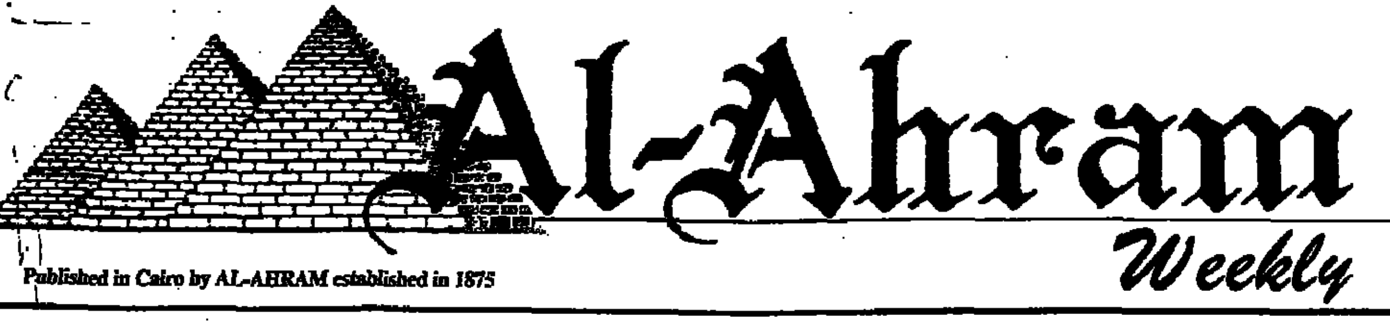


Al-Ahram Weekly

No 326 الاهرام ويكلي

Published in Cairo by AL-AHRAM established in 1875

22 - 28 May 1997 | 18 Pages | P.T.75

Chahine, portrait of the week by Bahgory 10

Mubarak-Arafat talks

FRESH from a visit to Germany, President Hosni Mubarak held talks in Cairo yesterday with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat on the stalled Middle East peace process, reports **Nevine Khalil**.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said the two leaders also discussed the outcome of Mubarak's trip to Bonn, which included talks with Chancellor *Helmut Kohl* and Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel. Moussa said the Bonn trip was "part of the effort to contain the current crisis and deal with [Jewish] settlements." He stressed that there could be no peace without a solution to the settlement problem.

Asked about Mubarak's proposal for a six-month freeze on the construction of settlements until negotiations open on the future of Jerusalem, Moussa commented: "The idea is to have a moratorium on the building of settlements in order to pave the way for meaningful *negotiations*." *(see p.2)*

Destined for success

No sooner had Egyptian film buffs accepted that Youssef Chahine's *Al-Massir* (Destiny) would be screened outside competition in Cannes than chance intervened and it was decided that the film would be entered in the main competition. As it turned out, writes **Hani Mustafa**, Chahine has won the 50th Cannes Film Festival's lifetime achievement award.

The Palme d'Or was shared by the Iranian film *The Taste of Cherries* and Shohie Imam's *Unagi the Eel*. In honouring Chahine and the Iranian director Kirostami, Cannes is once again reasserting its opposition to censorship in any form. The homage to Chahine's entire oeuvre obviously includes *Al-Muhagir* (The Immigrant), once the subject of a lawsuit demanding its banning on religious grounds, while *The Taste of Cherries* ends with a stab at censorship practices.

"That Egypt should be represented at this international forum... is a great honour for Egyptian cinema, particularly so since this is the 50th festival," said Sayed Said, director and head of the Egyptian Film Critics' Association. To Said and others, the homage Chahine received at Cannes is *further indication* that the so-called crisis of the Egyptian film industry is one of production rather than creativity. "But," he added optimistically, "it is not rash to speculate that Chahine's award may well boost the possibility of more co-productions between Egypt and European countries which would bolster the Egyptian film industry."

Among the many impatiently awaiting the screening of Chahine's *Al-Massir* in Egypt is Sheikh Youssef El-Badri who spearheaded the legal *campaign* against the director's previous film.

"I am looking forward to meeting Youssef Chahine and seeing his new film," says El-Badri. "We have nothing against refined art; what we *object to is art that* maligns faith."

"The problem of all those who were awed by the West — starting from Rifaa Al-Tahtawi via Taha Hussein and Ali Abdel-Razek and ending with Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid, Hassan Hanafi and Youssef Chahine — is that they all advocate the separation between religion and the state. We totally reject such a separation," El-Badri continued.

Meanwhile, Chahine sent a cable to President Mubarak from Cannes, saying he was dedicating his award to Egypt, "the bastion of light, freedom and beautiful art."

'A battle of wills'

PRESIDENTIAL adviser Osama El-Baz says the parties concerned with the Middle East peace process are now convinced that the idea of holding Camp David-style negotiations to break the current deadlock is unrealistic. Referring to the 1978 summit that grouped presidents Carter and Anwar *El-Sadat* and Prime Minister Menachem Begin in the Maryland retreat, El-Baz said: "Most people have reconciled themselves to the fact that it is not realistic to go for such a step.... It is unrealistic to confine the two parties [Palestinians and Israelis] to a resort and then expect them to come up with a magic formula for settling difficult problems."

El-Baz, speaking in an exclusive interview with **Nevine Khalil**, said the "point of departure should be to convince Israel to establish a moratorium on settlement activities, including those in East Jerusalem." He said the construction of settlements, which involves "confiscating land, dragging people from their homes and deepening the wedge between the Palestinians and Israelis" should be stopped. In return, El-Baz added, "the Palestinians would be required to go into full-fledged cooperation and coordination on security matters and other issues."

Asked about Israel's proposal for holding final status negotiations now, El-Baz replied: "Theoretically, there is no harm in going on both tracks simultaneously. But for this to take place, you have to move first on the interim agreements. Israel has to fulfil certain obligations, such as implementing further redeployment by mid-1998."

On Netanyahu's hard-line policies, El-Baz expressed the belief that "the present Israeli position should not be taken as final. They are testing the will of the Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims..." He said that Israel wants "to see how far it can go. They will do whatever they can get away with. But if they are checked, they will have to reconsider their position and behave accordingly."

He vowed that "we are not going to let go or give in. The Palestinians are standing on solid ground and are supported by the majority of nations."

El-Baz described Egyptian diplomatic efforts in the following terms: "The role of Egypt is not to deliver the Palestinians or Arabs... Egypt's role is to arbitrate, to stabilise, to lead the peace."

El-Baz said "Israel will definitely hurt" if Arab and Muslim states — but not those who signed peace treaties with Israel — brought to a halt the process of normalising relations. "The Israeli people themselves will discover that the current policy of their government is hurting their own cause."

On the unsuccessful American effort to break the deadlock, El-Baz said: "It would be unfair to expect the US to impose its will on Israel. Just as the US cannot impose its will on the Palestinians, by the same token, or for even more reason, it cannot impose it on the Israelis."

(Full text of interview, p.3)



photo: Randa Shaath

FOOT POWER: In a small corner of busy downtown Cairo the on-going battle between pedestrians and motorists seems to be weighted in favour of the former as once congested streets, such as El-Alfi, above, are now closed to vehicles *(see p.4)*

A window on realpolitik

EGYPT'S Road to Jerusalem is the title of Dr Boutros Ghali's latest book, recounting his experience as one of the architects of Egypt's foreign policy in the days of Egyptian-Israeli peace-making. Now that the road to Jerusalem appears to have been closed, as a result of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's hawkish policies, "we are facing a major crisis, as far as the Palestinian question is concerned."

In an exclusive interview with **Hoda Tewfik** in New York, Ghali insisted that "a way out must be found, either through a mediator, bilateral or international consultations, or confidence-building measures. Public opinion in America and the whole world should also be mobilised" on the Arabs' side, he said.

Ghali, in the past, repeatedly advocated "more negotiation" as the only means of breaking the deadlock in stalled negotiations.

The former secretary-general of the United Nations is planning another book, which should be completed in October, about his experience in what many people consider the world's top diplomatic post. In this book, titled *Five Years as Secretary-General*, Ghali revealed he intended to underline the message that the UN is the "sole forum for defending the interests of small and developing nations." When reminded that the UN is controlled by the major powers, Ghali urged Third World countries to close ranks in order to play a stronger role within the world organisation.

He cited the example of former Yugoslavia, under the late President Tito, "which managed to act as a major power and to make use of the UN to play a leading role in international gatherings and relations."

In his book Ghali will narrate the circumstances that led to his election as secretary-general, those that led to his exit, as well as the international issues which required his intervention, in the process admitting that "in many cases, politics are one thing and justice is something else." But he was particularly happy about Iraq's oil-for-food deal with the UN, which he managed to clinch despite a variety of obstacles.

"I also managed to reduce the severity of the credibility crisis between Libya and the UN," he said. "But in other cases, I did not succeed."

Now a resident of Paris, Ghali hopes to return to the world of academia once the book is finished. He has been asked by UNESCO to supervise the establishment of an international commission on the "relationship between development and democracy."

"I am interested, not only in democracy within the state, but also in the democracy of international relations," Ghali said. "Talk of democracy within the state is meaningless if the world order is undemocratic."

Labour after Peres

Martin Indyk, US ambassador to Israel, gave vent to American frustrations as Israel's political map changes irrevocably, writes Graham Usher from Jerusalem

"Oslo has broken down," said Indyk on 18 May. "Israel was promised security; the Palestinians were promised self-government and a credible pathway to negotiating their rights in a final status agreement". But "terrorism on the one side and unilateral acts on the other, creating the impression that the final status issues are being pre-empted, have combined to break this trust".

Stung by Indyk's implicit criticism of Israel's "unilateral acts" such as the decision to build the Har Homa settlement in the occupied West Bank, Israel was swift to play down any talk of a crisis in its relations with the US. "There was nothing new or unsettling in [Indyk's] speech," said Netanyahu's media adviser, Shai Bazak.

Other Israelis were less sanguine. Former Israeli Foreign Ministry official and one of the main architects of the Oslo Accords, Uri Savir, said Indyk's comments were "extremely severe".

"For the first time the Americans are blaming us equally for terrorism," he said. Labour leader, Shimon Peres, went further still, warning that the Likud government's policies were risking America's "involvement" in the peace process.

For PLO leader Yasser Arafat, US "involvement" remains the key to any progress on the Oslo track. But, it appears, involvement is no longer sufficient. Asked to respond to Indyk's comments, Arafat said the crisis over Oslo was due to "the US not exerting any pressure to save the peace process". Arafat's dilemma is that the kind of US pressure he wants is unlikely to be forthcoming.

During Ross's several meetings with Arafat last week, the US special envoy made it clear that the Palestinian Authority (PA) would be ill-advised to bank on the fall of the Likud government before the end of its four year term. Rather, Arafat should set about "forging compromises" with Likud to resuscitate the Oslo process, presumably by dropping his insistence that a settlement freeze accompany any return to negotiations. Arafat's response to Ross's advice was to cancel a meeting with the special envoy on 15 May, dispatch a letter to President Clinton calling for his "personal intervention" in the crisis and let it be known to all that the Palestinians were unimpressed with Ross's "ineffective" mediation efforts.

Arafat's panic is understandable. Ever since the crisis over Har Homa erupted two months ago the growing consensus among PA officials has been that Oslo would remain stuck as long as Netanyahu and his coalition were in power. To exacerbate Netanyahu's diplomatic isolation, Arafat has forged alliances with the Arab world, the EU and the Labour opposition, most notably by giving quiet support to Shimon Peres' attempts to form a "national unity" bloc in place of Netanyahu's rightist-religious coalition.

This strategy is now in tatters. After his acquittal on corruption charges, Netanyahu has, if anything, emerged stronger among many constituencies of Israeli opinion. As for Peres' plans to form a national unity government, this — along with his own leadership ambitions — increasingly look like history.

On 13 May, Israel's Labour Party convention voted by 1,403 to 856 to postpone any decision on appointing Peres to the new post of party president. The decision was a resounding victory for former army chief-of-staff and Labour Knesset member Ehud Barak, who is widely seen as the next party leader once Peres steps down in June. Barak is known to be hostile to the new post, especially since Peres has made it clear that he views the position not as an "honorary" title but as giving authority over the party's policies on youth and foreign relations.

Most Israeli commentators think the end of the "Peres era" in Labour politics has arrived. It was an ignoble exit. Whatever Peres's diplomatic successes, many Labour activists see him as the politician who lost five general elections. He is also accused of dividing the current opposition by persisting with the national unity idea often in the teeth of his own party's objections. During a long and disjointed speech at the convention, Peres asked rhetorically, "Am I a loser?", to which there were calls of "Yes".

So is this the end of an era in Palestinian politics? Peres was the main Israeli brain behind the Oslo formula and had struck up a degree of trust in his relationship with the pro-Oslo PA leadership, most notably with Arafat. Should, as the polls predict, Barak become Peres' successor the relationship may not be so intimate, or the commitment to Oslo so sure.

Known by Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza as a particularly ruthless army chief-of-staff during the last years of the *Intifada*, Barak's track record on Oslo is hardly encouraging. He was the only member of Yitzak Rabin's cabinet to vote against Oslo's interim agreement, sided with Ariel Sharon's suggestion that Hebron should be permanently partitioned into "Jewish and Arab" areas, and threatened a no-confidence motion should the Likud government not proceed with the Har Homa settlement. More immediately, Barak has rejected any moves to a national unity government, preferring to keep Labour in opposition until the next Israeli elections in the year 2000.

INSIDE

Al-Ahram Weekly

Building bridges to Europe

President Mubarak, turning to Europe for assistance in salvaging the Middle East peace process, visited Germany this week for high level talks. **Nevine Khalil** reports from Bonn



President Hosni Mubarak travelled to Germany this week to urge Bonn — a heavyweight in European politics — to use its political clout and rally European support in efforts to revive the stalled Middle East peace process.

Mubarak's trip is part of an Egyptian effort to nurture a European role by holding continuous consultations with influential states such as France, Britain, Italy as well as Holland, the current president of the European Union (EU). "The priority now was to come here and find a way out of the crisis," one Egyptian official said.

Mubarak has said that although the United States is the principal mediator in the stalled peace negotiations, Europe should step in to give a boost to the American effort. In talks with Chancellor Helmut Kohl and Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel on Tuesday, Mubarak underscored the need to put on hold Israel's settlement activities, especially in East Jerusalem, until the opening of final status negotiations.

During the talks with Kinkel, Mubarak "underlined his concern and growing disappointment over the standstill" in the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, the German Foreign Ministry said in a statement. Mubarak said that "for the Arab side, further constructive talks are only possible if Israel stops the construction of settlements" on occupied territory, Kinkel's office said. The president called on the EU to join with the United States to "take on a pronounced political role" in getting the peace process back on track, the statement added.

In an interview with the German newspaper *Handelsblatt* before leaving Cairo for Germany, Mubarak suggested a halt to settlement construction until negotiations could begin on Jerusalem. "If the Israelis were prepared to suspend settlement building until negotiations about Jerusalem have started; perhaps for six months, things could look different," Mubarak said. He suggested that the Europeans make it clear to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu that peace can be achieved only "if Israel offers something in return."

The Arabs — and the Third World generally — are certain to court Germany's influence and favour if it succeeds in gaining a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. But some senior Egyptian officials argue that to increase the number of nations with veto power at the Council is not necessarily a good thing, especially in view of Germany's abstention from voting on a recent General Assembly resolution condemning settlement building in occupied Arab territories.

"Do we really want to increase veto powers at a time when it is obvious that the use of the veto has negative results?" asked Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, referring to the United States which blocked a Security Council resolution denouncing Israel's building of a Jewish quarter in Arab East Jerusalem twice in March. Moussa maintained that the expansion of the Security Council should be a "comprehensive deal," by means of which Third World and regional powers, such as Egypt and India, can also play a more prominent role in the UN body.

Another item on Tuesday's agenda in the Bonn talks was the on-going negotiations for an Egyptian-EU partnership, which are facing a number of obstacles, notably the issue of Egyptian agricultural exports. Egypt hopes that Germany will lend a helping hand in reaching an overall political, economic, social and cultural partnership. Also under discussion was the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, or *Barcelona process*, which began in 1995 between EU countries and 12 Mediterranean states. The process involves political, security, economic, social, cultural and humanitarian cooperation, and is expected to result in the creation of a large free trade zone between all 28 countries.

On the bilateral level, Germany is capable of playing a key role in the transfer of technology and know-how to Egypt. Already the two countries have initiated an ambitious plan to raise the standard of skilled workers in Egypt through the so-called Mubarak-Kohl project. Since the programme began two years ago, 210 factories in seven industrial cities introduced technical education and on-the-job training for their workers. The project will be expanded in the future by increasing the number of training centres.

Trade between Egypt and Germany amounts to DM2.2 billion annually. German exports to Egypt consist mainly of industrial and electronic equipment and automobiles, making Germany the second largest exporter to this country after the US. Imports from Egypt, amounting to DM600 million annually, include textiles, iron and oil. Germany also tops the list of tourism to Egypt, with more than half a million Germans visiting this country every year.

Germany is a prominent partner in Egypt's economic reform and restructuring programmes as well as human resource development. Industrial giants such as Mercedes Benz, BMW, Hoechst, and Siemens now look to Egypt's attractive investment potential and see it as a promising market. German aid to Egypt averages nearly DM200 million per year, a third of which is in the form of grants and the remainder in soft, long term loans.

Military mandate for Mubarak

Despite objections from the opposition, the People's Assembly has extended President Mubarak's mandate to conclude arms deals. **Gamal Essam El-Din** attended the debate

Following a heated debate last Sunday, the People's Assembly voted to give President Hosni Mubarak unrestricted powers to conclude military purchases and make financial allocations for armament and other military purposes.

The president of the republic was first given this mandate in 1972 and it has been renewed periodically since then. With an overwhelming majority of 394, the 454-member Assembly approved the latest three-year extension. The mandate authorises Mubarak to "issue law-decrees concerning armament allocations and other allocations for the armed forces until the end of fiscal year 1999/2000." The idea behind the presidential mandate was to avoid public debate of sensitive security matters in the People's Assembly.

The extension faced strong objections from 12 opposition and independent MPs, who argued that it was unwarranted because the secrecy cited by the government is no longer possible at a time when the United States is almost the sole supplier of weapons to Egypt.

But Ahmed Abu-Zeid, leader of the National Democratic Party [NDP] majority, said the extension was "necessary" in view of the unstable situation in the region. Secrecy and speed are prerequisites in any military transactions, he said.

Ramadan Abul-Hassan, an NDP deputy for Suez City, said that, "some armament deals should be kept secret because they have political dimensions. We all have full confidence in President Mubarak."

However, Khaled Mohieddin, leader of the left-wing Tagammu Party, said opposition to the extension "had nothing to do with the confidence we have in President Mubarak. We are talking here about decrees that infringe upon the Assembly's rights and powers. As far as secrecy is concerned, the Assembly is quite capable of debating military deals in great secrecy," he said.

Mohieddin also objected to the speed at which laws and law-decrees are rammed through the Assembly. "This law-decree, for example, was submitted to the Assembly yesterday [Saturday morning] and now [Sunday morning] it is being approved," he said.

Fouad Badrawi, a representative of the Wafd Party, also argued that law-decrees stripped the Assembly of its powers and that military secrecy was no longer warranted. "Military matters are now made public in every country and are debated by parliaments," Badrawi said.

Omar Abu-Steit, an independent MP, pointed out that Article 108 of the Constitution states that the president, once the mandate expires, should submit a report on the agreements which he concluded to the Assembly. "Therefore, I urge the minister of defence to execute this constitutional provision," he said.

Ragab Hemeida, the sole representative of the Liberal Party, surprised the Assembly by defending the extension. He argued that Egypt is threatened by an enemy [Israel] which possesses "all kinds of mass destruction weapons." Egyptian security is also threatened by unrest in the Great Lakes region of Africa and the Bab El-Mandab Straits, the southern entrance to the Red Sea and the emerging military alliance between Turkey and Israel, he said. "In such a situation, the opposition should close ranks with the president of the republic," Hemeida said.

Sameh Ashour of the Nasserist Democratic Party objected to the extension and seized the opportunity to criticise the United States. "Armament is no longer a secret because the United States is the principal supplier of weapons to us," he said. "The US is imposing on the Arab world certain types of weapons which are inferior in quality to those provided to Israel."

The sole abstention came from Mohamed Marzouk, an independent representing the Nile Delta governorate of Beheira.

Court vetoes private medical school

An administrative court has objected to the opening of a faculty of medicine at a private university. **Shaden Shehab** reports

The administrative court of the State Council has, in effect, ordered the shutting down of the sole faculty of medicine run by a privately-owned university. In a ruling handed down on 13 May, the court said the decision by the Sixth of October University to open a faculty of medicine should be suspended.

The court said that the aim of private universities should be "to upgrade the level of education and scientific research...and not to make a quick profit." The court added that experts assigned the task of evaluating the medical school's capabilities had found them to be lacking. Laboratories, lecture rooms and professors' rooms were adequate only "for students who are enrolled this year. There are no research laboratories for the teaching staff, whose number is not adequate and most of them are on loan," the court added.

The court ruling was in response to a lawsuit filed by Hamdi El-Sayed, chairman of the Doctors Syndicate. He sought a court injunction to bar the Sixth of October University — one of four newly established private universities — from opening a faculty of medicine.

El-Sayed contended that the university did not have the necessary laboratories and hospitals to provide students with an up-to-standard medical education. The Sixth of October was the only private university to start medical education this academic year. El-Sayed welcomed the court's decision, which, he said, was based on the evaluation report by a committee of prominent doctors. He questioned the university's declared intention of building a hospital. "If they are serious about this, why didn't they put the money in the bank, why didn't they start construction?"

Asked what would happen to the students already enrolled, El-Sayed responded that the "government should find them a way out." He suggested that they be allowed to enrol in state-run universities, on the basis of the grand total of their marks in the secondary school certificate.

"I did not object to the establishment of these private universities. What I do object to is their hasty decision to open their doors to medical students before the necessary facilities are in place," he said. El-Sayed complained that private faculties of medicine might become a gathering place for the mediocre sons and daughters of the "rich elite who believe that their money can buy their children a good education." The tuition fees of the faculty of medicine stand at LE25,000 a year.

El-Sayed had earlier vowed that the graduates of private universities would not be allowed to join the Doctors Syndicate, thus making it impossible for them to practise medicine.

Samir Badawi, the university's president, said he would contest the court's order. "If we lose, then all private universities should be shut down because other faculties could easily meet the same fate. It would certainly be a tragedy," he said.

Badawi insisted that hospital and laboratory facilities would have been completed by the time the students required them. "We would deserve to be hanged if we weren't going to provide the necessary labs and hospital," he said. The university had only opened this year, he explained, while the labs and hospital would not be needed until the students were more advanced. "How can anyone believe that we will make students study for a couple of years, then tell them that they cannot finish their education because we do not have a hospital for their training? This is not child's play."

Badawi claimed the university was in the process of building a LE20 million hospital. "Investors are ready to put up the money and we are in the process of choosing the company that will be in charge of construction," he assured.

According to Badawi, the faculty of medicine will remain open until its appeal is considered by a higher court. In his view, the battle is an ideological one. "The people fighting us are not only against the opening of the faculty of medicine but against private universities in general... This is an ideological debate: paying money to universities is wrong and having a private university education means you are a thief," Badawi said. He, on the other hand, believes that money is a necessary ingredient to "upgrade the level of education and offer students an education that will make them doctors in the true meaning of the word."

A presidential decree allowing the establishment of private universities was issued last July. However, the new universities came under fire for charging high tuition fees, thus excluding poor students.

The Supreme Universities Council has deferred a decision on whether to grant equivalency to private university degrees. It will not rule on the matter until the first batch of students graduate from the four private universities four years from now. Equivalency will not be granted if the curricula taught by a private faculty proves to be below standard.

Bar Association torn by new rift

A power struggle at the Bar Association culminated in an extraordinary general assembly last week, aimed at putting an end to a year-long custodianship imposed on the Association by the courts. **Mona El-Nahhas** reports

In an extraordinary general assembly of the Bar Association last week, hundreds of lawyers of different political affiliations decided to take action to terminate a year-long court-imposed custodianship of their syndicate.

The lawyers who organised the assembly maintained that the meeting was legal and that its recommendations would be put into effect. However, the Association's three court-appointed custodians dismissed the meeting as unlawful and declared its recommendations null and void.

The custodianship was imposed on the Association, which had previously been controlled by the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, in April 1996, as a result of a court order issued at the request of a group of anti-Islamist lawyers. The lawyers claimed that Islamists on the Association's Council had committed serious financial irregularities.

The Abdin Court of First Instance appointed three custodians to run the Association's affairs until a new council could be elected. However, after a year, many lawyers felt that it was time for the Association to re-assert its independence.

Last month, more than 1,000 lawyers submitted a request to Bushra Asfour, deputy chairwoman of the dissolved council, calling for an extraordinary general assembly to discuss the custodianship issue. Asfour approved their request and the assembly was scheduled for last Thursday.

Ahmed Goma'a, an anti-Islamist lawyer, sought an injunction from an Administrative Court to prevent the assembly taking place. However, the court threw out the lawsuit on a legal technicality — that no "administrative decision" had been taken to organise the assembly. The custodians interpreted the court ruling as being in their favour and published newspaper advertisements to this effect, urging lawyers not to attend the "illegal" assembly.

On Thursday, they went further, closing the Association's downtown headquarters, and inviting the police to take whatever security measures they deemed necessary. The building was cordoned off by members of the Central Security Forces and their armoured vehicles.

Undeterred, the organisers of the general assembly decided to change the meeting's location to the Association's Cairo branch. Large numbers of security personnel were positioned outside this building too, but did not prevent the lawyers from entering.

Lawyers stood in long queues to sign their names before the start of the meeting. According to Saad El-Naghi, in charge of collecting signatures, 2,700 names were recorded.

Recommendations calling for an end to the custodianship were proposed by the meeting's organisers and quickly approved. A committee of prominent lawyers was formed to take charge of the syndicate's affairs and help a 'judicial committee' organise elections for a new council. The assembled lawyers decided that nominations for council posts, including chairman, should begin on 10 June and that elections should be held on 21 August. They also decided to take 'disciplinary measures' against the lawyers who had closed down the syndicate's headquarters and secured the custodianship order from court.

Abdel-Aziz Mohamed, chairman of the syndicate's Cairo branch, asserted that the extraordinary assembly was legal. "Anybody who has objections can go to court," he said. Mohamed praised the "honourable attitude of the lawyers who challenged the obstacles designed to hinder the general assembly."

Asfour expressed resentment at the "disgraceful" action of the custodians who had "invited the police to close down their own syndicate." If the custodians had really had the lawyers' interests at heart, she told the assembly, "they would never have attempted to obstruct the expression of your free will and undermine your dignity."

"We have nothing but our brave hearts, and will keep defending the independence of our syndicate," she added.

Ahmed Nasser, a prominent lawyer, echoed her sentiments, urging his colleagues to "maintain the struggle to liberate your syndicate, which will always remain a bulwark of freedom and democracy."

Moukhtar Nouh, treasurer of the dissolved council, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Islamist lawyers were not planning to contest any future elections. "Our role is over. We have made great achievements and have nothing more to offer," Nouh said. However, he did not rule out a reversal of this decision once the confrontation between the Islamists and the government was defused.

Ahmed Reda El-Ghatwari, one of the Association's three custodians, claimed that only 700 lawyers had attended the assembly, when the required quorum is 3,000. This, together with the fact that the assembly was held outside the syndicate's headquarters, rendered the meeting null and void, El-Ghatwari said, alleging that it had been organised by Islamists. Another custodian, Ahmed Hassan El-Mahdi, argued that a further delay in the elections would benefit most lawyers. "The custodians have achieved a lot during the past year and they need more time to bring their work to fruition," he said.

Brawl at espionage trial

A fist-fight broke out at the trial by a state security court of an Egyptian and an Israeli on spying charges. **Amira Howeidy** was there

The trial of Azam Azam, an Arab-Israeli accused of spying, and Emad Ismail, an Egyptian alleged to be his accomplice, deteriorated into a brawl last Sunday, as opponents of Azam's lawyer, Farid El-Dib, fought with the lawyer's supporters. El-Dib himself was punched in the face.

The drama unfolded when lawyer Mortada Mansour, who has no connection with the case, walked into the courtroom. Claiming that he represented both the "Egyptian people" and the Bar Association, Mansour informed presiding Judge Moharram Darwish that he wanted to sue Azam and Israel for "crimes against the Arab nation." He demanded LE100 million in compensation for the families of the victims of the Qana massacre in Lebanon.

Mansour turned to El-Dib and told him that he should not have agreed to defend the "Israeli spy." He presented Judge Darwish with a copy of a decision by the Bar Association's Cairo branch to refer El-Dib to a disciplinary board on 11 June, for having consented to defend Azam. Mansour emphasised the importance of adhering to a decision taken by the Union of Professional Syndicates to halt all forms of normalisation with Israel.

El-Dib's appearance as Azam's defence lawyer at the opening of the trial on 24 April took fellow lawyers by surprise and provoked much criticism. However, if El-Dib had not agreed to act for Azam, the court would have been legally obligated to appoint a lawyer to defend him.

The judge then called a recess, but tension continued to mount in the courtroom when David Gorvin, first secretary at the Israeli Embassy — who attended the trial along with Azam's family and former Knesset member Asaad El-Asaad — objected to Mansour's remarks.

"You, Zionist... Netanyahu is a murderer," Mansour shouted back. Mansour's companions also shouted in anger and reporters and cameramen jumped over the wooden benches to get closer to the affray. Dozens of security men struggled to keep everybody seated.



Azam Azam and Emad Ismail stand in the dock during their trial on espionage charges (left) while Israeli Embassy diplomats, with Egyptian security men behind them, take seats in the courtroom before the mêlée broke out *photos: Nour Sobieh*

Mansour became hysterical when Azam's brother told reporters that Mansour had offered to defend Azam but that his offer had been turned down. "You lying Zionists... I never had any contact with them... They are the servants of the murderer Netanyahu," Mansour screamed.

Following the 10-minute recess, the presiding judge announced that Mansour's request to file a lawsuit against Azam and Israel could not be accepted because it fell outside the court's jurisdiction. He then adjourned the hearing until 14 June.

After the judge left, another mêlée broke out when Emad Louis, a supporter of Mansour, jumped on El-Dib and punched him twice in the face. He was removed by security men, who also surrounded the Israeli group on the other side of the courtroom. More fights broke out between Mansour's and El-Dib's supporters until they were forcibly removed by the security guards.

Mansour called El-Dib a "traitor" and told reporters that he had "tarnished" the image of Egyptian lawyers. "He [El-Dib] should have followed the procedures used in such cases. He should have filed a request with the Bar Association... But he went to those Zionists for money and did not spare a single thought for Egypt's interests. He is a traitor and a corrupt lawyer."

Meanwhile, other lawyers gathered in the courtroom's corridors, shouting "Down with Israel... Down with Farid El-Dib." Others demanded Azam's execution.

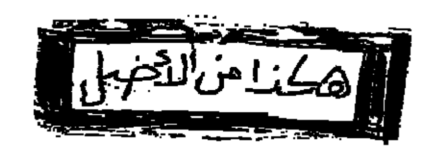
To most observers, Mansour's request to file a lawsuit against Azam and Israel was a publicity stunt, possibly related to future elections at the Bar Association. "This is why he jumped on the anti-Israel bandwagon," suggested a legal source, who requested anonymity. "Mansour knows full well that his request falls outside the court's jurisdiction."

Meanwhile, El-Dib denied that he had been served notice by the Association's Cairo branch to appear before a disciplinary board. "As far as I am concerned... it is all nonsense," El-Dib told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

He pointed out that any disciplinary board should include two members of the Association's council. But the council was dissolved a year ago when the Association was brought under court-appointed custodianship. "So how can they form a disciplinary board?" El-Dib asked.

Azam was originally accused of providing espionage assistance to the Egyptian defendant, Ismail, in the form of women's underwear. The underwear was said to produce secret ink when soaked in water, which could be used for spying. Two weeks ago, prosecutors added a new charge against Azam — "criminal complicity with the aim of communicating with a foreign country to harm Egypt's national interests."

Two Arab-Israeli women, who are believed to be in Israel, are also standing trial in absentia on similar charges.



'Israel is doing itself a disservice'

Presidential adviser Osama El-Baz, insisting that Israel cannot have its cake and eat it too, says the first step towards salvaging the peace process is to clamp a moratorium on settlement activity, particularly in East Jerusalem. In an exclusive interview with Nevine Khalil, El-Baz described the current situation in the stalemated negotiations as a battle of wills between the Arabs and Israelis. The victor, he believes, will be the side which holds out longer

photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

The peace process is in a very critical situation. Exactly where do we *stand*?
A continuation of the present atmosphere is impregnated with danger, threats and risks. We don't like to think of the nightmare scenario: a prolonged *impasse* leading to a long deadlock that could ignite the atmosphere further, and pave the way for violence and counter-violence. We would get into a vicious circle which would take us back to the point of increasing tension.

What ideas is Egypt putting forward to reactivate the process?
We believe *that the point of departure* should be to persuade Israel to establish a moratorium on settlement activities, including those in East Jerusalem. Settlement activities are eroding people's confidence in the peace process and injuring the credibility of the process itself. Israel [must] stop all forms of settlement activity because *they entail the confiscation* of land, dragging people out of their homes, deepening the chasm between the Palestinians and Israelis and making so many people desperate. This policy does not help create the positive atmosphere that is needed for continuing the peace process.

Israel must realise that for any formula *to succeed it* would have to be a balanced formula that observes and guarantees the legitimate rights of both peoples. If Israel operates on the assumption that it is superior, the situation will be lopsided, and the Palestinians are under no obligation or pressure to accept whatever is given to them by Israel, whether it is good or bad, whether it is right or wrong.

The peace process is by nature a process that has to be nourished, and each party has to help the process by building confidence and rekindling hope in the hearts and minds of the peoples involved. Yet Israel is attempting to impose its will on the other party, and create a *fait accompli* every day *through unilateral* actions that are contrary to international law and the letter and spirit of the agreements which have been signed.

Settlement activities are one item that is going to be on the agenda for the final status negotiations, and for either side to try and confront the other with a *fait accompli* on this issue means rendering negotiations on the subject matter meaningless. What are they going to *discuss* if Palestinian land *is studded* with settlements every day?

What is the proposed course of action?
Israel should find a way to stop construction and infrastructure work in Jebel Abu Ghneim/Har Homa. They should sit down with the Palestinians and discuss issues related to further redeployment. They should stop harassing the Palestinian inhabitants of East Jerusalem. *They should stop the confiscation* of territories.

The Palestinians would be required to go into fully-fledged cooperation and coordination on security matters and other issues. If they sit down and negotiate continuously, it would ease the atmosphere throughout the region and make other aspects of Israeli-Arab relations more promising. It would encourage countries to establish relations with Israel.

Israel cannot have its cake and eat it. It cannot have it both ways. It cannot deprive the Arabs of their fundamental rights and at the same time expect the Arab countries and Arab people to get into the so-called 'normalisation process' and continue to normalise relations. If Israel wants this to take place, then there is a certain price to be paid. Everything is reciprocal and there is no unilateral gain for one at the *expense* of the other.

But Israel wants to charge into final status negotiations now. Is this feasible?
The final negotiations should, in fact, have begun already, but we are lagging behind on our *schedule*. Theoretically, there is no harm in going on both tracks [interim and final status negotiations] simultaneously. However, for this to take place, you have *to* move first on the interim agreements. Israel has to fulfil certain obligations, like implementing further redeployment by mid-1998. Unless the Israelis keep moving in this direction, the Palestinians will find there is no use discussing final status issues [while] Israel *is* confiscating *land*, *expanding* the existing settlements and resorting to unilateral actions which are contrary to signed agreements, either in letter or spirit.

If Israel does not move on the easy issues in the interim negotiations, how can anybody have faith and confidence in the Israeli position on such explosive and complex issues as the final status of settlements, Jerusalem, refugees, borders, water, security and cooperation? *If Israel* cannot move on the transitional arrangements, how can one expect it to move on such difficult and extremely sensitive issues?

Do you feel that the Palestinians will be *over*whelmed if they are rushed into final status negotiations?
There is no risk in the Palestinians involving themselves in [*final status*] *negotiations*, [but they] are under no pressure to do so. They have every reason to say: 'Well, for us to get into the heart of these issues, we have to make sure the interim agreement is being *implemented* in good faith.' The thing is, how can they trust Israel as a partner, or even as an adversary on the other side of the negotiating table, if Israel is trying to impose its will by sheer force — through bulldozers, confiscation of land, the building of bypasses all over the place, and through disconnecting Palestinian towns and villages, making it difficult for the Palestinian inhabitants of East Jerusalem to keep their ID cards, and not honouring the right of those who travel to come back? *Israel should* know that it is doing the peace process a disservice, which means that it is doing itself a disservice.

***Some observers* believe that peace moves will be suspended for the next three years, until there are new elections in Israel. Do you think this is likely?**
That couldn't be the case because Israel is under certain obligations to fulfil its commitments under the interim agreements and the Declaration of Principles in Oslo I and then in Washington on 13 September 1993. We cannot suspend the peace process until Israel gets into another round of elections. It is the obligation of *Israel as an entity* to fulfil its commitments, regardless of the government, regardless of the politics, regardless of the pressure from the right-wing extremists in Israel or Palestine.

The fact that the extremists would not like their government to fulfil its obligations is no answer, because each side must reconcile itself to delivering on these commitments and be faithful to them.

Israel is not listening to the Americans, the Europeans, its Arab peace partners... It's not listening to anyone at all, so how will it be persuaded to honour its commitments?
We believe that the present Israeli position should not be taken as the final position. They are testing the will of the Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims, who have issued recommendations and resolutions in their meetings in Islamabad, Rabat and Cairo. *These resolutions have not been in vain. They re*flect the views of hundreds of millions of Arabs and Muslims. The Europeans have taken a very constructive and objective position as well, [although] it is regrettable that some European countries have deviated from the decisive, pan-European position.

The Arabs, Muslims, the non-aligned countries and Europe have all made their voice very clear: 'What Israel is doing is illegal, and an impediment to peace. These *policies* have to change and these practices must stop.'

The notion that Israel can defy the entire world is an illusion. They might be able to do that momentarily, but they cannot possibly continue to defy everybody simply *because they are supported by* the US and Micronesia. No matter what they say, they cannot defy world public opinion.

But it *is* not a matter of what they say, it is a matter of what they go ahead and do.
This is not the end of the story. This is a stage. They want to see how far they can go. If they can get away with whatever actions they take, *they will do it. But if they are checked*, they will have to reconsider their position and weigh their actions and behaviour in light of the surrounding circumstances, [especially in relation to] the Arab countries which have made peace with Israel, and how [their behaviour] would augur in terms of future coexistence between the Palestinians and Israelis.

They want to know if the universal reaction [opposing Israeli actions] is real — *how deep it is, how* profound, whether the Muslim countries would really honour their recommendations or not. Is it just a passing phase, or is it a firm commitment to *prevent Israel from* taking *steps* that are contrary to the rules of law and constitute a deviation from the right path? If you weigh the views of all these people against the views of the right-wing extremists in Israel, it would be ridiculous to say that some 100,000 people can impose their view against the will of all these nations.

Some Arabs say that we are talking while Israel is acting, but this is because Israel is in possession of Palestinian territories — *the* situation is lopsided.

The Arab and Muslim worlds have passed many recommendations, but when will they take firm action?
They have started to take action in the direction of freezing the normalisation process. Israel will definitely hurt. The Israeli people themselves will discover that the current policy of their government is hurting their own cause. This will hurt the Israeli people's perception of their future, it will hurt Israeli business at home and abroad, it will hurt the Israeli economy. It will breed the kind of tension which is unnecessary, and *Israel* cannot live *with* tension for a long period of time. If anyone in Israel thinks he can get away with anything, he is wrong. [The Israelis] discovered this in the weeks that followed the election of the Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and the formation of the new cabinet... You should not give up on Israeli public opinion, because it is watching what is happening.

But don't Netanyahu's continued hard-line policies implicate Israeli society as a whole for not opposing them strongly enough?
When [Netanyahu] assumed office it was very clear that he did not endorse or accept wholeheartedly the Oslo deal, but there was nothing he could do. He couldn't disown it, so he said: 'I'm going to honour it, but I'm going to implement it in a different style — *my own way*'. *I believe he has changed his views* somewhat, but not enough to comply with the commitments of Israel. Some hardliners over there are convincing the Israeli general public to give the prime minister a chance to impose his peace on the Arabs. I do not call this an Israeli peace, it is the peace of the Israeli right wing.

Many people in Israel are opposed to that, and if the Arabs conduct themselves in an intelligent manner *and continue to be constructive, objective and ad*dress themselves to the Israeli general public, I believe domestic pressure will mount and the Israeli government will have to honour its commitments.

Meanwhile, Netanyahu continues his procrastination and Israeli public opinion waits on him.
After the withdrawal from Hebron, it seems to me that he wanted to appeal to the hardliners by taking this ill-advised step in Jebel Abu-Ghneim. It was not called for, it was not a necessity, it was not an emergency. The Palestinian, Arab, Islamic, European and non-aligned reactions could have been *predicted* very easily. *It would have been* very strange indeed to expect all these peoples to take this lying down, or to allow Israel to ram it down their throats.

I believe that Israeli public opinion is going to finally weigh on the Israeli government. The polls show that a greater percentage of people is beginning to seriously question the effectiveness, propriety and wisdom of Israeli policies. If this continues, I believe that a *sizeable majority* of Israelis will make their position very clear. The voices of the hardliners, the extremists, the ultra-right will be drowned. This die-hard minority cannot force its will on the Israeli people.

One also has to bear in mind that on 3 June a new leader for the Labour Party in Israel will be elected, which will enable the party to have a greater voice. Other bodies like the Meretz Party and Peace Now are also active. The elections will not be a turning point, but will be one factor on the Israeli political map. It would be only natural for the new leader to be active and pursue a more active policy. We do not expect this election to turn the course of events right away, but one hopes for a more activist public opinion movement [among those] in Israel who are opposed to the current line of policy.

One would expect the prime minister of Israel to behave like any politician. If he sees that he is not supported by the majority of his people, he would have to change course gradually.

So does this mean that he currently believes he is supported by the majority in his country?
No, in my opinion he thinks the...majority of the Israeli people is saying: 'Let's give him a chance and see how far *he can go. If he can* get us a better deal than the previous government, let's give him some time.' If they see that these hardline policies are not working, they will have to rethink their position.

We should not give up. We will continue to press for a more balanced, flexible and constructive Israeli position that will enable us to continue the peace process. We don't want the peace process to be interrupted and the hard work *over the* past years to be [destroyed]. *We* hope the Israeli people realise that.

Apart from reaching out to Israeli public opinion, and issuing statements and recommendations, what cards do the Arabs have left to play?
The Arabs cannot reveal their strategy while the other side is allowing itself the luxury of thinking quietly. The important thing is to continue to press the other *side* with legitimate *and lawful* demands. What we are asking of Israel is not a deviation from or violation of the letter or spirit of signed agreements.

Arabs should think in terms of competition and conflict management within the constraints of peace. The continuation of the status quo would prevent countries inside and outside the region from taking political and economic steps towards Israel. *Israel will have to realise that if the [regional] ec*onomic summit to be held in Qatar in the autumn is to be successful, it will have to change its course. The present state of affairs does not pave the way for such a thing [success], and will definitely render any attempt to build or reinforce a process of regional cooperation between Arabs and non-Arabs in the region useless.

If Israel is determined to impose its will, I believe *it will lead to chaos, because the balance that exists* between the rights and obligations of each party will be lost. We are watching the situation very closely; we are not going to let go or give in. The Palestinians are standing on solid ground and are supported by the majority of the world. They are being very reasonable, flexible, proper, and it is very important for them to do this.

What is your response to the call for countries like Egypt, which have signed peace treaties with Israel, to freeze relations?
Egypt has been a law-abiding country since the time of the pharaohs. We could not possibly violate or *breach agreements which we have signed*, [if we want to] maintain the credibility of Egypt as a country which respects its legal commitments and obligations. Since President Hosni Mubarak took office, he has never considered in any way abrogating the treaty.

It is not important to take rash measures just to express frustration; what is important is to conduct objective policy that is likely to persuade the other side to behave constructively. Israel should care about its image before 60 million Egyptians. It has its eye on Egyptian reaction to its policies, which explains why Israelis are complaining every day about the lack of enthusiasm in Egypt and what they term as the 'cold peace'. They complain about the attitude of the intellectuals, the political parties, the average person, which shows that they are concerned.

They cannot take Egypt lightly because, whether anybody likes it or not, Egypt remains the region's big power. The role of Egypt is not to deliver the Palestinians or Arabs, or accept whatever Israel is doing. Its role is the arbiter, the stabiliser — to lead the peace. In order to lead to peace, [Egypt] would have to make its own independent judgement. It is the country which took the first step, and many risks, for peace. When Israelis think of their future, or co-existence, *no one in his right mind* can neglect the Egyptian factor.

How does Egypt feel about Jordan's attempts to supplant its role?
We do not think that Jordan is trying to subvert or replace the Egyptian role. Jordan is a neighbouring Arab country which signed a peace treaty with Israel and has the same misgivings and objections to Israeli foreign policy as we do. When expressing its views, there is a certain degree of diversity in terms of manoeuvres. There is no doubt that the Jordanians, from what we have heard from them on different occasions, believe that the current Israeli line of policy is very dangerous and could lead to chaos in the region, and that this course of action cannot be tolerated. They are also supportive of the Palestinian line. We do not think any country in the region, especially an Arab country, would place itself *into* a position of competing with the Egyptian role. There is a role for everybody.

The idea of holding a second Camp David summit was floated recently. What is your evaluation of such a proposal?
Many Arabs, like many Israelis, are thinking aloud. So every now and then an idea of this nature would pop up, but one cannot say that this is the official line or policy of Jordan, or that Jordan is pursuing it. *Those* who first proposed the Camp David Two formula were elements from outside the region, and some Israeli politicians thought that it was a good idea, but after a while, most people reconciled themselves to the fact that it was not realistic.

Under the current circumstances, it is not realistic to hold a meeting where the two parties *will* be confined to a resort and then expect them to come up with a magic formula for settling these difficult problems.

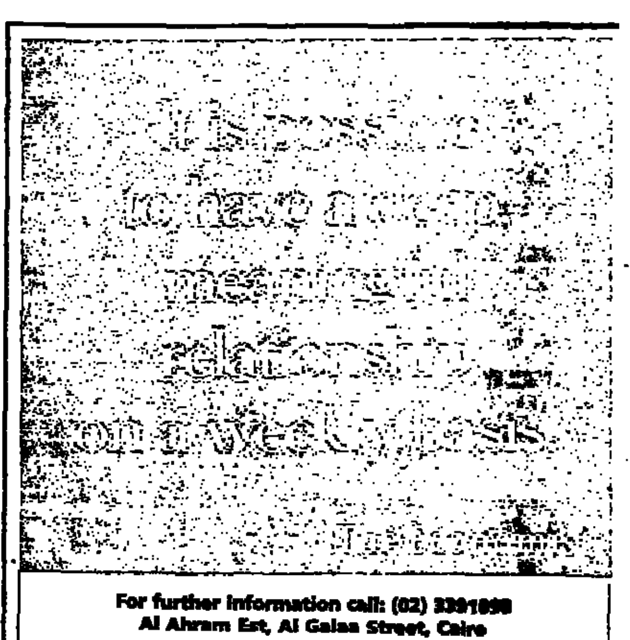
The situation by nature is dynamic and these dynamics have their own logic. We hope that the coming few weeks will witness a change in attitude that could bring us back to the days of optimism and hope, cooperation and coordination.

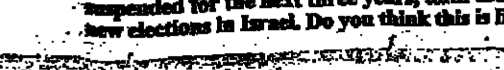
Since the beginning of President Bill Clinton's second term, the US performance in the peace process has not been successful. The Americans don't seem to have any influence over Israel.
One cannot say that [US efforts] have led to nothing, because even though time is of the essence, I say we should not give up hope on Israel listening to the voice of reason, including the voice coming from Washington. It would be unfair to expect the US to impose its will on Israel. As much as the US cannot impose its will on the Palestinians, by the same token, it cannot impose *it on the Israelis. The US* does not approve of the Jebel Abu-Ghneim idea, plan and project, and they have made this clear to Israel on several occasions quietly. To our knowledge, they have never given Israel any indication that they approve or are willing to acquiesce to this line of policy. It [the US] believes it is wrong and a risky road. It sees these actions as unhelpful, untimely and coming at a very crucial stage, when everybody was *looking forward to the second phase of re*deployment.

Everybody was expecting Israel to sit down and discuss with the Palestinians the depth of redeployment in the second phase, and instead here comes a hurdle. Instead of one step forward, we moved three or four steps backwards. It is hard to tell why the US was unable to be more effective, why they were unable to tell Israel: 'We have sup*ported you, protected you in the Security Council*, and now it is time for you to realise that you have to move along.'

A reason might be that some elements within the administration believe that if they take a hostile attitude towards Israel there will be a price tag on the domestic scene.

But the US administration did not change much after the elections. There is the same president, with a stronger secretary of state, and the same special envoy to the Middle East. So does the problem lie with Netanyahu?
There is no doubt that the defeat of the Labour government *[in Israel]* was a factor. [Netanyahu] said he was elected by the Israeli people to pursue a different line of policy, and that he was behaving in accordance with the views and the will of the electorate. Also, it is quite obvious that the stronger, organised voice within the pro-Israeli lobby in America believes that the US should continue to support Israeli policies, whether it likes or dislikes these policies, and that the US should not impose its will on Israel. Despite the fact that many prominent Jewish individuals are unhappy with Israel's line of policy and have made this known, their views have not weighed heavily. Even though, qualitatively, they can be as strong as the other organised groups, quantitatively Israel is getting the message that the greater part of the organised pro-Israeli lobby in America is tolerating its hard-line policies on the grounds that they are the will of the Israeli people.











Pedestrians, undisturbed by speeding cars and honking horns, will soon be able to take leisurely walks in a section of downtown Cairo that will be closed to motorised traffic. **Reem Leila** and photographer **Randa Shaath** went on a stroll



Downtown promenade for pedestrians

Work is under way to turn a section of downtown Cairo into a promenade for pedestrians, studded with fountains, plants and benches and closed to all types of vehicles. In addition to making it possible for pedestrians to saunter at ease in the city centre, the scheme is also aimed at streamlining traffic, officials said.

But fears that the plan might produce the opposite result and add to the perennial traffic congestion in the downtown area have been voiced. And the owners of shops in the area, which has already banished motorists on a main street, complain they have suffered a dramatic drop in sales.

The 6,000-metre square promenade will include a section of El-Alfi Street, beginning at its intersection with Emad-Eddin and ending at Orabi Square. It will also cover sections of Orabi and Talaat Harb Streets. The first phase of the project, at El-Alfi Street which has already been closed off, will be completed in about one month's time. Work on the other streets will take about six months.

For years there has only been one pedestrian street in central Cairo, El-Shawarbi Street. Now, all is set to change.

Cairo Governor Omar Abdel-Akher, who toured the site on Sunday, said the scheme would make it possible for people to go shopping undisturbed by passing cars. "All European countries have areas for pedestrians. We should have the same. The studies that were carried out show that the plan will be successful."

Motorists will be able to use alternative streets: instead of El-Alfi, they can use the 26th of July Street and instead of Talaat Harb, they can use Sherif Street.

According to Cairo traffic chief, Mohamed El-Nazer, the traffic density in the alternative streets is expected to increase by 35 per cent during rush hours. "With a little organisation, this increase can be brought under control," he said. "Otherwise, certain one-way streets will be used in both directions."

District chief Ahmed Kadri said: "The streets that will be closed account for only 20 per cent of the downtown area. There is no need to panic. All that we are looking for is the cooperation of the public and the support of the press."

The initial work at El-Alfi Street included upgrading public utilities and the installation of natural gas pipes, to avoid possible digging in the future. Then, it was time for adding a touch of beauty. "The government is working to beautify the entire country and this is just the beginning," Kadri said.

People who strolled in the area saw a fountain and a mini-garden at the junction of El-Alfi Street and Orabi Square. There were wooden benches and pot plants along the pavements, which were covered by reddish tiles. A narrow stretch of asphalt extended between the pavements which will be used by service vehicles, such as those delivering goods to shops, between 10 and 12pm, twice a week. To achieve a harmony of colours, all buildings along the street will be painted beige.

As the governor toured the street, several shop owners and even pedestrians aired complaints.

Mursi Mohamed Attiya, a shop owner, wondered how the vans delivering goods to his shop would be able to enter, and then leave, the street. "The street is open only on one side and the asphalt path is too narrow for the vehicle to change its direction. What will happen if two or three vans enter the street at the same time, which is quite likely because of time constraints? How will they be able to get out? By moving backwards?" he asked.

Mohamed Sayed El-Samadouni, a baker, said sales have dropped sharply after El-Alfi Street was closed to motorists. "One of my bakeries is almost closed. I have lost more than 400 customers everyday. I have increasing taxes to pay, how would I be able to do so in such circumstances?" he wondered.

Sayeda El-Homosani, a housewife, expressed fear that the wooden benches would turn the street into another Nile Corniche, a meeting place for lovers. "This would be of great disadvantage to our children, particularly girls," she added.

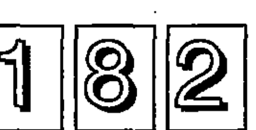
Pedestrians Iman Lutfi and Abdel-Razek Kamal said the plan was nice but thought it would make it more difficult for some people to go shopping. Kamal said: "How will a sick or old man be able to reach a doctor's clinic, if the nearest parking place is 15 minutes away on foot?"

Kadri, the district chief, responded that the drop in sales would only be temporary. "Once people get used to the new situation, sales will rise again," he said. "As for the clinic visitors, there are large parking structures at El-Ataba and Opera Squares. They can leave their cars there and walk the remaining distance."

But Dr Leila Moharram, a professor of planning at the National Institute for Planning, said the scheme was bound to fail because it was the result of an "irresponsible way of thinking and acting. This decision was not taken on a scientific basis. Such a change will not last for long."

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life



Strike action by the Egyptian labour movement began in the last decade of the 19th century. Work stoppages over the customary grievances — wages, working hours, holidays, overtime pay — were initiated by cigarette workers. Those in other occupations followed suit, including barbers, tailors, cab drivers, printing press operators and textile factory workers. In most cases, the strikes were effective and brought workers the benefits they sought. In this instalment of the *Diwan* series, **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** reviews the early stages of workers' protest action as reported by *Al-Ahram*

The last decade of the 19th century marked the birth of the Egyptian labour movement. The coal workers' strike in Port Said in 1894 and the cigarette roller's strike in Alexandria and Port Said in 1899-1900 are two major landmarks that have captured the attention of historians of the Egyptian labour movement. However, while historians generally dwell on the birth, they have not given due attention to the early infancy of the labour movement which also has its moments of trauma.

Al-Ahram gives a vivid portrait of the nascent labour movement during the first decade of the 20th century. It was a period that saw a proliferation of strikes in a wide range of occupations: tailors, barbers, bakers and dough-makers, cart drivers, printing press operators, spinning and weaving factory workers, not to mention the continued strikes of the fathers of the Egyptian labour movement, the cigarette rollers.

That this phenomenon should have acquired such momentum at this juncture is due, at least in part, to the increasing numbers of workers of European origin in the new Egyptian working class. Significant numbers of Greeks, Italians and British subjects from Malta and Cyprus, who filled the ranks of labourers particularly in the cigarette factories and printing presses, brought with them traditions of the European labour movement, and notably the mechanism of a workers' strike. The European presence in the labour movement added a complicating dimension to the strikes, since under the foreign capitulations system European workers and owners could take advantage of the immunities they enjoyed under this system. Moreover, the frequent interference on the part of foreign consulates tended to stay the government's hand in contending with the strikes with an appropriate degree of calm and steadiness. At the same time, the increasing centralisation of government meant that increasing sectors of the labour class were becoming directly subject to the authority of the state without the traditional guilds and their masters to act as intermediaries. Strikes were perhaps the natural if not the only outlet in order to alleviate the grip of the state.

The traditional crafts were also subjected to the pressures of changing consumer habits which, in turn, affected the demands of the striking workers. The price demands of the striking tailors in 1901 are indicative of changing tastes to which they had to cater: "An overcoat 92 piastres, a tail-coat 180 piastres, 88 piastres for a double-breasted jacket, 80 piastres for a single-breasted jacket, 80 piastres for a "smoking jacket". 68 piastres for a riding jacket, 20 piastres for trousers, 24 piastres for a waistcoat." Clearly demand for the traditional *galabiya* and *abaya* was in decline. In addition there emerged a fissure in this profession between the tailors who catered to European style tastes and those "popular" tailors who continued to provide for the native Egyptian taste. Whereas the *baladi* tailors would generally deal directly with their clients, most of the European style tailors, among whom numbered many Europeans, would have been contracted to work for the large clothing factories. This was the group that displayed the greatest degree of unrest in the 1901 strike.

First reports of this strike appeared in *Al-Ahram* in the winter of 1901. On 25 November, beneath the headline "Tailors Association", the newspaper announces, "The tailors held a meeting at the One Thousand and One Nights Café yesterday. They moved to go on strike today in order to convene a second meeting in which they will ratify their association's charter and determine their working hours. If the shop owners are dissatisfied with their demands, the members of the association will go on strike and prevent their co-workers from entering the workplace. This is a mixed association with over 200 members."

Two days later, *Al-Ahram* adjusted this figure to 750 members, adding that the union was also joined by a number of cigarette rollers. In addition to this expression of class solidarity, the workers also created a committee to help those who were too poorly off to be able to endure a lengthy strike. "Then they fixed the amount of the raise they wanted, printed up their demands and dispatched these letters to the factory owners. Since Sunday they have been marching around various quarters of the city and preventing the rest of the tailors from going to work in order to force the owners to comply with their demands."

Among these demands, printed up in a "Labour Code", were included a 20 per cent wage hike, a maximum of a 10-hour working day and absolutely no work on Sundays. Factory owners were responsible for ensuring that the workshops were fully equipped to cope with the demands on labour. If the work superintendent required the workers to work additional shifts in the evening beyond the hours stipulated in the code, management would have to pay overtime amounting to an additional 50 per cent of the salary.

Like workers' unions everywhere, for their strike to be successful, the strike had to be comprehensive. Clashes with co-workers and scab labour were, therefore, commonplace and frequently required the intervention of the police.

The clothing factory owners created an association of their own to counter the strikes. As *Al-Ahram* reports, "We have learned that more than 80 garment factory owners met at the premises of Monsieur Kolacote in order to come to terms among themselves over the prices which the striking garment workers have demanded and in order to form an association that would safeguard their interests in the future." The names of the garment factory owners who attended the meeting indicated that most of them, unlike the striking workers, were of European origin. After their second meeting the following day, they sent a communiqué to *Al-Ahram*.

The garment workers, they said "did not notify the factory owners before calling their strike in order to give them sufficient time to deliberate over the demands. When they did receive the demands, they held a meeting during which they decided that in view of the means by which the tailors sought to achieve their ends, the owners refuse to recognise their society. They are also prepared to come to terms with the tailors should they demand work. However, the members of the society are demanding 50 per cent higher wages than what is paid in London for the highest skilled labour."



Illustration: Makram Henein

In response, the garment workers published their demands in the press. Factory owners must hire the garment workers on a regular basis, they insisted, whereby the workers would receive a regular monthly salary and "receive as much during the high season as they do doing the low." Secondly, garment workers should not be required to mend ready-made clothes of whatever kind. Thirdly, working hours should be from 7am to noon and from 2pm to 7pm in the summer and from 7am to 1 noon and 2pm to 7.30pm in the winter. If factories must operate additional hours, workers must be paid time and a half and if a tailor is commissioned to work outside of the normal working premises he will receive extra pay. Severance notice must be given a minimum of 15 days in advance. Notice must be delivered in writing clarifying the reasons for severance. If factory owners require additional labour they must notify the garment workers society and if a tailor is in need of work he too must notify the society.

A week passed without progress, prompting the garment workers to hold another meeting during which they resolved to continue the strike. Several people came forward to support them in their strike. The owner of a bakery offered to supply the workers with bread throughout the duration of the strike and one of the foremen offered to supply the tailors with fabric so that they could continue work independently. After the meeting, the garment workers "poured out into the streets shouting slogans." On 4 December 1901 *Al-Ahram* announced, "The striking garment workers held a meeting today in A Thousand and One Nights Café. The central committee informed the workers that a group of factory owners had agreed to recognise their society and to accept their conditions. Therefore, the committee has decided that the workers in those factories may report back to work."

On 6 December, *Al-Ahram* announced that the garment workers' strike had ended. Forty factories had acceded to the strikers' demands and the remaining four were on the point of announcing their decision. "The workers have returned to their jobs and the affair has ended," concludes the newspaper jubilantly.

The affair may well have come to a successful completion for the garment workers. Yet no sooner had they achieved their aims than strikes spread, like a fever, to other occupations. The year 1902 saw two major strikes: the coachmen's strike in Alexandria and the barbers' strike, which was based in Alexandria but extended to Cairo on a smaller scale.

Al-Ahram reports: "The coach drivers have ignored the set fares and some even refuse to post them... In short the set fare policy is as good as non-existent. When complaints reached the police commissioner, he availed himself of the opportunity to inspect the carriages and to force the cab-drivers to display the set fares in a place visible to the passengers. However, the drivers refused. They commonly charge double the prices of the regulation fares."

As the chief police commissioner of Alexandria demanded stricter enforcement of the regulations, the coachmen became more adamant in their refusal. Some even resorted to ruses, such as circulating the rumour that the governor intends to levy a new tax. "In this manner, they were able to declare a general strike. On the morning of 6 April approximately 2,200 coachmen gathered in Manshiya. However, they caused no unrest as the police were stationed around them from all sides."

The coachmen's strike may have lasted only a day, but its ending was dramatic. "The strike continued unabated until about 2:00pm. Then it was announced that the carriages would return to their original fare policies as the commissioner announced that the fares were in fact prejudicial to the cab drivers since they were modeled on the fares in Cairo. The commissioner is now deliberating new fares that would both prevent excessiveness and avert prejudicing the rights of the coachmen."

The barbers' strike offers another illustration of changing lifestyles. Like tailors, there were two types of barbershops: the traditional barbers scattered throughout the popular districts and the fancy salons that sprang up in the cities' European quarters. In the former, the shop owner was generally the neighbourhood barber who personally cut your hair. He would have a young apprentice to help him out. The European-style salons were more like a small commercial enterprise. Generally owned by Europeans, they would have a larger staff, usually Egyptians. As for the clients, they would be Europeans or upper class Egyptians who preferred to emulate European fashions.

The strike began in Alexandria at the end of January 1902. It was the European barbershops that were affected. "A large number of barbershop employees have assembled and resolved to go on strike if their employers do not comply with their demands," reports *Al-Ahram*. The demands were modest: Sunday afternoons off as of 1pm; summer opening hours from 7am to 8.30pm and winter opening hours from 7.30am to 8pm.

On 14 February they met again, formed an association and elected a president. At this juncture the governor intervened. On 17 February all "master barbers" were summoned to Manshiya police station where the police commissioner asked them to comply with the demands of the employees. "Those who do not agree will only have themselves to blame if they become the target of the employees' syndicate." All the employers agreed.

As for the cigarette rollers — the true fathers of the Egyptian labour movement — their strikes during the first decade of the 20th century were a continuation of the movement they had begun in the previous decade.

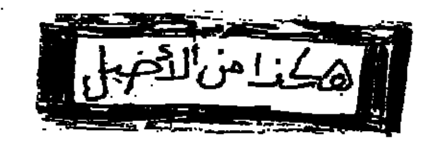
Although *Al-Ahram* was generally sympathetic to the cigarette workers' plight, when action turned to violence as in the case of the Susa factory, *Al-Ahram* adopted a different attitude. On 14 December 1901 the newspaper announced, "The workers in this factory were not content simply to seek to prevent their colleagues from reporting to work. They sent two delegates to Alexandria in order to incite the workers in the Susa branch of the factory there to go on strike. We advise these groups of cigarette rollers to refrain from such practices the result of which will only be detrimental to their cause. Both the government and the people have become annoyed at such actions since all individuals are entitled to the freedom to work and the workers themselves are the first to be harmed by the principle of forcing people to go on strike."

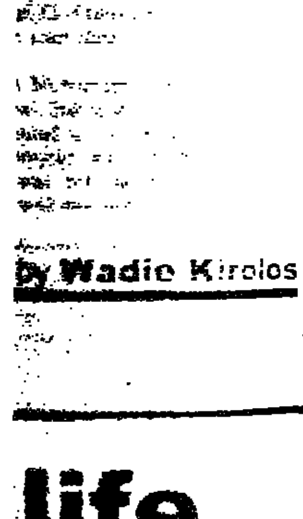
Ten days later the newspaper resumes in more detail, "The people have become fed up with the activities of the striking cigarette workers. The strikers rally every evening by the train station in order to prevent the Susa workers from entering the factory and in the daytime they designate individuals to stand guard in front of the factory. These guards are prepared to confront anyone going in or out of the factory, even if it is Lord Cromer [the British High Commissioner] himself."

The cigarette workers' agitation continued for five months. Perhaps the recurring strikes in Egypt at the outset of the 20th century prompted numerous articles in *Al-Ahram* on strikes in Europe. "Ours is not to invent but to follow," reads the headline of one. "Strikes in Egypt" was another headline that introduced the newspaper's exasperated commentary: "The cigarette workers strikes only harm the workers themselves because people can always stop buying rolled cigarettes. The barbers' strike was child's play, with their apprentices running around the streets trying to force the barbershops to close. Again, there are many people in Egypt who can dispense with barbers." Of course, such sentiments, if typical for the times, would not serve to dissuade the angry workers and craftsmen who formed the rank and file of the incipient Egyptian labour movement.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.







Reaching beyond

While Egypt and Morocco edge towards integration, Egyptian businessmen venture into Africa

Maghreb outreach

The unprecedented chairing last week of the Joint Supreme Egyptian-Moroccan Committee by President Mubarak and King Hassan coincides with moves to integrate the economies of both countries with the global economy.

The step is significant in bringing together two major Arab countries to operate as an Arab economic bloc which can withstand the difficulties associated with integration and liberalisation. Morocco has joined the European Partnership. Egypt is still engaged in negotiations with the EU.

The two countries underlined their resolve to boost inter-Arab trade. President Mubarak stressed the importance of Arab countries achieving an "Arab economic bloc ... operating in a world order based on balance and equality."

The two countries signed 11 documents on economic, financial and technical cooperation, including a memorandum of understanding concerning the creation of a free trade zone.

An agreement was signed calling for bilateral trade to increase from $20 million to $200 million in the next two years.

A number of protocols were signed concerning cooperation in agriculture, fishing, energy, mining, electricity, transport, tourism, health, public works, housing, administration and the environment.

The decision last March to have the two heads of state chair the nine-year-old committee was aimed to give it more weight and power.

The joint committee, normally headed by the prime ministers of both countries, convenes every six months to discuss ways of boosting bilateral cooperation. In 1989, the two countries signed a trade and customs agreement underscoring the importance of integrating the two countries into the global economy. The agreement specifically recommended that both countries coordinate their policies in international economic forums, such as the GATT and the UN Conference on Trade and Development.

According to a report by the Egyptian Commercial Representation office in Morocco, trade still needs to be upgraded, especially on the part of Morocco, where most exports go to the European Union.

The report lists the most important Egyptian exports to Morocco as oil, cotton textiles, fertilisers and chemicals. Morocco primarily exports preserved fish, seed and mineral products. Obstacles to trade between the two countries include the shortage of shipping facilities, a matter which increases transportation costs.

[Chart — legend: Egyptian Exports; Egyptian imports; Balance of trade; Volume of trade. Y-axis: 0, 50, 100, 150, 200, 250. X-axis: 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995]

The two countries established a Moroccan-Egyptian fishing company and a joint Business Council. The Egyptian Federation of Chambers of Commerce and the Moroccan Federation for Trade and Industries Chambers signed an agreement establishing the Egyptian Moroccan Development and Investment Company.

Nevine Khalil

Egypt-Arab trade needs boost

Egypt's total exports to Arab states in 1995 amounted to LE1,629 million, down from LE1,732 million in 1994 and LE1,799 million in 1993, according to Ahmed Hamdi, minister plenipotentiary at the Trade Representation Office of the Ministry of Supply and Trade.

Sluggish trade between Egypt and other Arab states is part of a broader phenomenon. Inter-Arab trade represents only 7 per cent of these countries' share of international trade.

According to Hamdi, this modest performance is due to poor transportation, substandard products, and incompatible monetary policies.

Nariman Ahmed, commercial adviser at the Trade Representation Office, stresses inadequate quality. Substandard goods, she says, tarnish the reputation of Egyptian industry. So does smuggling. Goods that fail to meet required standard specifications are often smuggled abroad and Egyptian goods acquire a bad reputation as a result, she notes.

Ahmed believes that the General Authority for Control on Exports and Imports (GACEI) is not playing its full role in ensuring that exports are of an acceptable quality. She proposes that all exports be subjected to GACEI control. She also recommends that Egyptian exporters establish permanent agencies in Arab states.

Politics are also to blame. For example, Egypt's trade with Iraq, at one point nearly 23 per cent of Egypt's trade with Arab states, came to a sudden halt following the Gulf War.

Imam Reda, director of the exports department at the GACEI, says that, unless instructed by a ministerial decree, the GACEI is not empowered to check on all exports. Reda suggests that a ministerial decree be issued, giving GACEI full, permanent control powers. Reda notes that the GACEI is equipped with up-to-date quality control facilities.

In an attempt to promote inter-Arab trade, Arab states have taken steps to liberalise trade among themselves. Sources at the Trade Representation Office say that, according to plans initiated last February, tariffs between Arab states should be cancelled over a period of ten years —10 per cent each year.

Discussions are also under way for the establishment of a free trade zone between Egypt and a number of Arab states. Egypt and Jordan signed an agreement to free their trade within 10 years, and Egypt is negotiating with Kuwait, Morocco and Tunisia to conclude similar agreements.

Zeinab Abul-Gheit

Africa ahoy

A couple of Egyptian businessmen are playing for high stakes in the East African Great Lakes region that encompasses Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, southern Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zaire (now renamed Congo). Other Egyptian businessmen are about to follow suit. So far, the region has had an unenviable record in attracting foreign funds but a few intrepid Egyptian investors have staked their reputation on the success of their African business ventures.

As Egypt and its African neighbours to the south move away from state-run economies to open markets, businessmen are taking the lead in cementing ties between the Nile Basin countries. When Foreign Minister Amr Moussa toured Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda last month, he was accompanied by Egyptian businessmen who have an eye on Africa's potential. "This is a new kind of Egyptian diplomacy in Africa and we're adjusting fast," Marwan Badr, Assistant Foreign Minister for African Affairs, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

As civil wars in the region are quelled, the newly-installed governments in Rwanda, Burundi and Zaire are following the Ugandan example of focusing on the environmental catastrophe that looms large across the region. Trees have been disappearing en masse, fed into the peasants' cooking fires. Ibrahim Mukiibi, Uganda's ambassador to Egypt, told the *Weekly*: "The deforestation of the Great Lakes region will have a disastrous environmental impact on Egypt. As the forests are cleared, the rains become more erratic, the volume of water in the River Nile is reduced and Egypt's water supply decreases. That is why Mohamed Metwali's hydro-electric power project is essential for us. It will help us electrify rural areas, have enough power for a rapid industrialisation programme and even export surplus power to neighbouring countries."

Kato Aromatic's Ibrahim Kamel and Mohamed Metwali, the youthful chairman of Arabian International Construction (AIC), were in Uganda during Moussa's visit. Kamel and Metwali closed separate deals with the Ugandans in Moussa's presence — with the Egyptian government's blessings. Metwali is constructing a giant hydro-electric scheme near the Kalagala Falls on the River Nile in the Mukono district of Uganda. Metwali's investment was guaranteed by the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), an affiliate of the World Bank. He went to Uganda with German technical experts and signed a power purchase agreement with the Uganda government with guarantees that it will buy the power he will generate. The investment cost Metwali some $400 million, but he knows that he is going to recoup his investment in no time. The deal was done on a BOT (build, operate and transfer) basis.

Timing is of critical importance in an ever-changing Africa. Kamel bought the land for his project just before Uganda's new constitution was enacted. Under the new Constitution, promulgated in October 1995, foreigners cannot own land: they can only lease it from the Ugandan government. Kamel and Metwali are hoping to stake out their own piece of the "Pearl of Africa", as the celebrated former wartime British Premier Winston Churchill once described Uganda.

Kamel has been operating in Uganda for the past three years. His long-term strategy is to use Uganda as a springboard for doing business with other African countries. Kamel opened a branch of his Cairo International Bank in Kampala. Then, he bought land in Entebbe, Uganda's commercial capital and site of its international airport, and another plot on the road to Jinja, where the source of the White Nile is located, in the Mabira forest, 28 kilometres from Kampala. Kamel's 364,000-square-metre swath of equatorial jungle is to be transformed into an industrial zone. He intends to start with some 40 firms and hopes that other companies will follow suit. He also plans to construct a 25-storey commercial complex in Kampala which he envisions to include luxury apartments, shopping malls, government and commercial offices, banks and other enterprises. The complex occupies 4,000 square metres of prime property land in the city centre on Kampala Road, the capital's main thoroughfare. The complex is designed by another Egyptian company, Sabour & Associates.

Other Egyptian businessmen have tried to do business in Uganda and other African countries, but their plans went awry. Said Abdel-Aziz Ismail of Majestic and Cairo Overseas Industrial Corporation had a thriving business in Uganda exporting coffee but he closed shop last year. The Ugandan authorities say that he owes them debts to the tune of $500,000 in unpaid taxes. Several Cairo-based African diplomats told the *Weekly* that incidents like these damage the image of Egyptian businessmen in East Africa. African governments have little inclination to attract bogus investors and common crooks.

What about the small fish? They go to East Africa posing as businessmen and end up in retailing and petty trading. Suspicions of the smaller firms in Africa are based on their terrible track records. The Egyptian Industrial Corporation, the Samy Group and Nasr Corporation are represented in Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya, but the volume of trade generated by these companies is meagre. The idea is to export semi-finished products to Uganda and re-export them as "Made in Uganda" finished products to neighbouring African member states of the Economic Community of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). Sudan and Ethiopia have repeatedly blocked Egypt's attempts to join COMESA, the regional economic organisation that groups together most southern and eastern African countries. However, Egypt can enter COMESA through the backdoor, using Kenya and Uganda.

Gamal Nkrumah

Cash for war victims

Thousands of Egyptians who suffered from the Gulf War are being either compensated or told of impending cash. ***Mona El Fiqi*** *sought their reaction*

Seven years following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, thousands of Egyptians, who were forced to flee the war, received or were promised cash compensations.

The United Nations Compensations Commission (UNCC) has so far approved 299,000 of what it calls Category-A claims, valued at $823 million, for Egyptians. The beneficiaries have been divided into six batches to facilitate the administration of payments.

The UNCC compensation payments are funded by 30 per cent of the revenues of Iraqi oil exports, as stipulated in UN Security Council Resolution 986, popularly known as the oil-for-food deal.

Last week, the Ministry of Manpower and Recruitment began to deliver compensation cheques to the first batch of Category-A claimants, which includes 23,300 Egyptians.

Thousands of claimants go daily to the labour office to check their names in the lists at the third floor of the Mogammaa, the mammoth administrative complex overlooking El-Tahrir Square.

Abdel-Kader El-Aassar, adviser to the Ministry of Manpower, says that the compensation cheques will be distributed through two offices in Cairo and many others in various governorates. "The ministry expects to receive the second batch of Category-A cheques from the UNCC by next July," El-Aassar said.

Hundreds of victims of the Iraqi invasion gathered in front of the labour force office. Some of them were disappointed over the size of the compensation.

When Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990, Magdi Ahmed, an Egyptian accountant who was working in Kuwait at the time, put his family in the car and drove for two days out of Kuwait, leaving behind all his possessions. Last week he received a cheque for $2,500 from the UNCC.

A young nurse, speaking on condition of anonymity, said: "My husband was killed during the war and I lost my home with all its contents. The dollars I will receive will never compensate for my losses."

Most claimants argue that the compensation rate for Category-A, which ranges between $2,500 and $8,000, is too low. One of them said: "My shop was destroyed during the invasion. It was worth LE150,000."

Philip Fawzy, another victim of the war, said that the $2,500 he will be getting seven years after the invasion is not enough even to replace the refrigerator he had in his flat which was destroyed during the war.

Another group of claimants expressed satisfaction with the compensations. When they filed their claims, five years ago, they had no hope that they will receive indemnities.

Abdel-Mohsen Mahmoud, a worker who came back after the war to find his family deep in debt, said: "I am happy to receive the cheque because I did not expect to be compensated at all, seven years after the invasion."

School secretary Reda El-Sakhawy said that he had lost all hope for compensation.

Claimants complain that the labour office does not go about delivering the cheques in an organised manner.

One of them said that two offices are not enough for the residents of Cairo to receive their claims, suggesting that claimants should receive their cheques from the nearest labour office in their district.

El-Aassar said that the crowding problem is due to the fact that all claimants, not just those of the first batch, keep going to the labour force to make inquiries. Claimants say they have to keep inquiring because sometimes notifications get lost in the post.

Ministry officials say that the delivery of compensations to the first batch of Category-A claimants will be completed by the first week of June.

Tourism: success or not quite?

A major earner for the national economy, tourism has been called a success story. But some people feel the industry still has a long way to go. Rehab Saad attended a debate on the art and industry of soliciting tourists

Except for brief interruptions, Egypt's tourism has enjoyed a sustained boom since the mid 1980s. Last year, revenues from tourism totaled $3.2 billion, making the industry the country's second highest foreign currency earner after expatriate remittances, according to government officials.

Incentives offered to investors, such as the right to import duty-free equipment and low rent for land in designated tourism zones, have resulted in a major expansion of tourist facilities.

In 1994-1995, the Ministry of Tourism allocated 39 million square metres of land to private sector investors in 21 zones. These projects, with a total investment of about $2.3 billion, will ultimately add 52,000 rooms to Egypt's current capacity of 67,000.

"The private sector is playing a key role in the tourist development process in Egypt," Tourism Minister Mamdouh El-Beltagui told a panel of experts attending the "Egypt, the emerging market" conference held in Cairo recently.

Since 1993, private investment has been "100 per cent" responsible for the sector's growth, according to El-Beltagui. The private sector is being encouraged to build airports, main roads and public utilities according to the B.O.T (build, operate and transfer) system.

In the last few years, the industry has changed tack, veering away from traditional archaeology-related tourism and opening up to the recreational, sun-sand-and-sea opportunities of the Red Sea and Sinai. Adventure travel, scuba diving and bird watching have found their way into the industry's, increasingly glossier, brochures.

According to Adel Radi, head of the Tourist Development Authority, tourist nights in the past were concentrated in Cairo and Alexandria. Now, 36 per cent of tourist nights are spent in new areas such as the Red Sea and Sinai. "We have to encourage this trend of having tourist projects in these areas. We have to go away from the valley and distribute our efforts in other places," he said.

Marketing and training are two issues which were highlighted in the panel discussions, billed "Tourism: Egypt's untapped potential." "Without sound marketing and training we will not be able to compete with other countries and we will be unable to fill the rooms we are building. We have to start to train people through the Middle East Mediterranean and Tourist and Travel Association (MEMTTA) programmes," said Elhamy El-Zayyat, head of the travel agencies chamber.

Since 1994, the government has been sponsoring promotional media campaigns in Germany, Italy, Britain, France, Japan, Switzerland, Spain, Gulf countries and the USA, Minister El-Beltagui said. The ministry is helping the private sector in organising training programmes for 50,000 workers in the tourist industry in cooperation with the MEMTTA.

Robert Collier, vice-chairman of Intercontinental hotels believes in investing in people. "Tourism in the 21st century will require business vision, craft skills, computer literacy, financial understanding, commercial and marketing skills," he said. In order to fulfil these objectives, there should be public-private sector partnership in training, he added.

Market report

Mood of anticipation

The general Capital Market Index dropped 7.8 points in the week that ended on May 15, closing at 374.4 points. The turnover during the week was LE 271 million.

The market's mood was one of anticipation, as more privatisation was promised by the government last week. The government promised to sell major parts of its holdings in the sugar, steel, aluminium, and hotel industries.

As part of the reported privatisation plans, LE 25 million of the Oriental Weavers Company (OWC) stock will be offered for public subscription. Traders are said to be bullish about the prospect.

During the week, the Commercial International Bank led the market in terms of the value of traded shares. LE30.7 million worth of its shares were traded, accounting for 11.26 per cent of the market turnover.

Faisal Islamic Bank witnessed the highest increase in share value. It gained 10.24 per cent, closing at at LE228.36 per share. Shares of the Alexandria Commercial Maritime Bank suffered the highest loss, dropping by 22.6 per cent to close at LE171.25.

Of the 129 companies covered by the index, share values increased in the case of 40 and decreased in the case of 51. Shares of the remaining companies remained unchanged.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**



Civilian trucks are queued up near the southeastern Turkish town of Cizre, last Saturday, waiting for the opening of the Habur border crossing to northern Iraq *(photo: Reuter)*

Clouds over the Mediterranean

Turkey, Israel and the United States prepare to conduct naval drills in the east *Mediterranean, and the Arabs are angry.* **Galal Nassar** *explains why*

Conflicting signals have been coming out of Ankara. First, there were reports that Turkey, Israel *and the United States plan to hold joint* naval training exercises in the Mediterranean. Then, Turkish Defence Minister Torhan Tavan denied the news. Two days later, a Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman said joint drills with Israel are scheduled for this summer. Last Thursday, a spokesman of the ruling Rafah Party said the military command has arranged for these manoeuvres without consulting the party.

There was another major contradiction last week: The Islamist-leaning government said the joint manoeuvres will be postponed indefinitely. But the secularist military said the exercises will take place on schedule.

The struggle between secularists and fundamentalists has made Turkey a land of contradictions, where ancient heritage vies for prominence with modern life, a state of affairs that can be found also in some Arab and Islamic states.

Last July's elections, won by the Islamist Rafah Party, deepened these contradictions, which are increasingly being reflected not only in domestic, but in foreign, policy as well. Thus, while Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan was in the process of concluding a $20 billion oil deal with Iran recently, the Turkish assistant commander-in-chief was in Washington condemning what he said were Iranian terrorist policies and warning against dealing with that country.

Turkey may share the kind of identity crisis *that has plagued most of the Muslim world in* recent decades, but it has one distinguishing trait: it strives to be a part of Europe. This is what endows the Turkish strategy with certain characteristics. Turkey may sacrifice its Islamic and Arab *ties to pursue its independent national interests.* This is where Turkish and Israeli strategies converge under the protective US umbrella.

General Chevik Bir, deputy chief of the general staff, multi-lingual, suave, and with a mind of *his own that led him to challenge Erbakan's* coalition on occasion, is believed to be the mastermind behind Turkish-Israeli-US security cooperation. He works closely with the Turkish defence minister and chief of staff to shape Turkey's military *policies, sometimes* without asking for guidance from Turkey's ruling coalition.

Security cooperation between the US and Israel, on the one hand, and between Turkey and Israel, on the other, is being perceived in the Arab world as a revival of Washington's containment policies at the height of the Cold War in the 1950s. While the main target of these policies at that time was the Soviet Union, the Arabs saw them as an attempt to impose US/Western hegemony and a backdoor through which colonial *domination could be re*instated, if in new forms.

Arab analysts now warn that Washington is trying to form a new regional military axis based on Turkey and Israel. Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa stated that "if these Turkish-Israeli military manoeuvres were intended as a specific message to the Arabs, or others, it will naturally be a source of concern." Esmat Abdel-Meguid, secretary-general of the Arab League, said that the Turkish government should take Arab sentiments into consideration. And a *joint statement* issued by Syria and Iran said that Israeli-Turkish military cooperation will increase tensions in the Middle East.

Al-Ahram Weekly has learned from informed sources in Cairo that preparations for the military drills have been under way for a long time. Among those involved in these preparations were Turkish *chief-of-staff General Ismail Hakki* Karadayi, his deputy General Cevik Bir, Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, and US Sixth Fleet Commander Vice Admiral Steve Abbott.

To Arab states, the establishment of an alliance *between* Turkey, Israel and the United States, at this particular juncture in the Middle East peace process, would be a cause of great concern. The Middle East peace process *has* been undergoing difficulties, and the manoeuvres could be seen as a further sign of US support to Israel and to a closer cooperation between the latter and another powerful neighbour of the Arabs. Last week, the Turkish newspaper *Hurriyet* wrote, "The purpose of Israeli-Turkish-American manoeuvres is to establish a tripartite alliance capable of rapid reaction in the event of a threat from Syria or Iran or of a Gulf crisis."

Syria, Iraq and Iran *could all* perceive the military agreement as a threat. The three countries along with Turkey are involved in the Kurdish issue and any fallout concerning this sensitive issue could have a disturbing impact on their security. *The Kurds want to establish their independent* State of Kurdistan in south-east Turkey. This has led to a prolonged confrontation which the Turkish government finds economically and politically costly. It is not difficult to see the mutual interests *between Israel and Turkey regarding security.* The two countries aim to monitor the common dangers threatening them and create a joint mechanism to confront those dangers.

From a military angle, Turkish-Israeli cooperation *opens* the Turkish *airspace before* the Israeli air force, thus making it easier for the Israelis to strike at targets in the region like Syria and Iraq.

The military cooperation agreement on the *whole* can be seen as a plan to besiege the Arab region. Israel will have an ally in the north and it already has friends in Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Africa in general. The evolving picture tallies perfectly with Israel's security strategy.

The agreement includes a *provision* by which Turkey would allow Israel to install, on Turkish territories, listening devices to monitor military movements in the region. This provision would give the Israeli intelligence service the ability to *spy on Syria and Iraq.*

Israel, in return, promises to provide Turkey with satellite data and images which will help it confront Kurdish militants. Moreover, the Turkish air force is expected to undergo complete modernisation *through a programme* costing $650 million to be implemented by Israel, with the financial support of the US.

Turkey, through forging closer links with Israel, hopes to secure more financial aid from the United *States. And, by pressuring Syria and Iraq, it aims* to discourage these countries from helping its Kurdish opponents.

How are the Arabs to break out of this siege? There is more than one course of action. One is to *use the Kurdish issue as a means of* "gentle persuasion" against Turkey. Another option is for the Arabs to mend their ties with Iran. A rapprochement of sorts is already under way between Iran and Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria. Such a rapprochement could *serve as a signal to the Amer*icans of a possible establishment of an Egyptian-Syrian-Iranian alignment, to counter the Israeli-Turkish-US alliance.

Spring's deadly cross-border rite

Fears are growing that Turkey's *military incursion into northern* Iraq may become a regular and *deadly rite of spring.* **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports

As Operation Spring Border-cross enters its second week, the Turkish troops which crossed the Iraqi border *in pursuit of the Kurdistan's Workers' Party* (PKK) fighters are there to stay for a long time.

The offensive, the largest such incursion to take place since 1995 when 35,000 troops entered northern Iraq and stayed for six weeks, is said to involve 50,000 troops *with* air and artillery *support.*

For four consecutive springs, the Turkish army has launched forays across the borders to wipe out PKK bases. This time it claimed it went to help the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) — one of the two main Kurdish factions in northern Iraq — regain control of the region.

Despite statements by military officials that the operation will be limited in scope, the English-language *Turkish Daily News* reported that Turkish troops are *installing camps in Zakho, 5km inside* Iraq from the common border.

Sources close to military circles told the *Weekly* that the operation in northern Iraq will continue "until the area is swept free of the PKK".

The timing of the operation, the source said, was due to the news that PKK members have reportedly spent the winter making preparations to infiltrate Turkey and carry out terrorist activities during the summer. The PKK seeks secession from Turkey.

"The PKK was oppressing the people of northern Iraq with the aim of installing itself as the main power in the region. The operation aims to demolish their camps in the area," said the source.

While official Turkish military reports claimed that, up until Monday, almost 1,000 PKK fighters have been killed in the operation, a PKK spokesman denied it and said the number of dead was lower.

The Turkish *Milliyet* newspaper, however, reported that "Turkish security forces have inflicted heavy blows on the PKK fighters". It said that "the militants were seen fleeing towards the Iraq-Iran borders".

Meanwhile, the US administration once again came to the support of its NATO ally Turkey and justified the recent operation in northern Iraq as a case of legitimate self-defence.

The operation has provoked strong criticism even among Turkish circles. Turkey's involvement in northern Iraq is meant to be a short-term, stop-gap policy, they say.

"Only the re-establishment of Iraqi authority in the autonomous north would be able to guarantee the security of Turkey," Kemal Kirisci, a political science professor at the Istanbul-based Bogazici University told the *Weekly.*

"The longer *the government refuses to consider* non-military rapprochement, the harder it will be to end the violence which is destabilising Turkey and undermining its democracy," he added.

Dr Najmaldin Karim, a pro-PKK opposition leader, described the operation as "the largest in modern Turkish history which will aggravate humanitarian suffering and regional instability. Previous cross-border operations have had limited effect on the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) guerrillas," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly.* "But Kurdish civilians have been killed, maimed, and forced to flee their homes which are sometimes indiscriminately bombarded. It is tragic and ironic that villages destroyed by Saddam, which were rebuilt and protected by American efforts, again face destruction at the hands of a US ally," he added. Turkey, Karim continued, cannot solve its Kurdish problem by using military force outside its borders. It must find a political solution within its own borders.

The invasion comes at a *time when* Turkey is witnessing a turbulent political situation at home. The action is seen by some observers as another manoeuvre by the army to discredit the Islamic-led government headed by Necemettin Erbakan, whose *party won a majority of Kurdish votes in the 1995* elections when it promised to seek a political settlement to the Kurdish crisis in south-east Turkey.

Turkey's cross-border operation has also drawn heavy criticism from Arab neighbours who, in the *words of professor Kirisci,* lost their faith in Turkish politics after the announcement of the Israel-Turkish joint military manoeuvres.

The Arab League called the recent operation "an interference in Iraq's domestic affairs".

"Northern Iraq is now left to the whims of those in power in Ankara," one expert commented.

One of the major consequences of this spring's incursion is that a massive humanitarian crisis appears to be in the making. International aid is channelled almost entirely through Turkey, providing *Turkish leaders with control over the Iraqi Kurds'* links with the rest of the world — an arrangement the Turks could now exploit. In past invasions Turkey repeatedly closed vital borders, delaying essential supply trucks for weeks at a time. Sometimes *humanitarian workers were also refused entry.*

The incursion came a few days after Turkish authorities banned a conference for a peaceful settlement of the Kurdish problem, which was to be held in Ankara, *claiming* that it would *damage* what one official termed the "indivisible integrity of the state."

The Turkish Government's decision underscored a long-standing *policy to suppress any effort aimed at* resolving by negotiation a conflict which has claimed almost 25,000 lives since 1984.

"Turkey fears the creation of an in*dependent Kurdish state* because the Turks believe it would inflame the nationalist aspirations of their own Kurds — about 20 per cent of the Turkish population. The result has been a *persistent* effort by Turkey to insure that the Kurds stay weak, poor and divided," said one source close to the PKK.

The attack came shortly before a *fourth round of peace talks between* the two fighting factions in northern Iraq began in Ankara. The talks under Washington's auspices, aimed to achieve peace between Mesud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Celal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

But the incursion threatened to put a political solution to the Kurdish problem even further out of reach. As one Turkish expert put it, "Unless Ankara confronts the real political issues which underlie Kurdish discontent and until the real issues are dealt with peacefully and democratically, I fear these invasions could become a regular and deadly rite of spring."

'Nothing left to negotiate'

Jebel Abu Ghneim is only the tip of the *iceberg of Israeli land appropriation manoeuvrings.* **Tarek Hassan** explains

A West Bank Palestinian official submitted an urgent report to President Yasser Arafat last week. Its contents revealed that the threat to Palestinian-Israeli peace was considerably graver than that posed by the insistence of the Israeli right-wing government on building a Jewish settlement in Jebel Abu Ghneim, in Arab East Jerusalem. According to the report, the *Israeli* government has been making use of the high profile and political furore over Jebel Abu Ghneim as a smoke screen to surreptitiously expropriate thousands of dunums (1 acre roughly equals 4 dunums) from strategic areas in the Bethlehem area, and throughout the West Bank.

The Israeli government plans to extend the Efrat settlement south of Bethlehem as well as the settlement of Daniel. The plan is to build 250 housing units in Beit Jala and further confiscate Palestinian land to construct a new tunnel in Beit Jala, while several other building projects would entail demolishing existing Palestinian property.

This is not all. The expansion of Israeli settlements is also taking place in other areas of the West Bank since Prime Minister Binyamin Ne*tanyahu decided last year to lift a four*-year freeze on most settlement expansion in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

An advertisement in local Israeli papers announced the confiscation of 9,685 dunums in the villages located south of Tulkarem, in the northern part of the West Bank, under *the pretext of establishing* stone quarries. Gamal Omar, a Palestinian researcher for the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights Information, warned *that* this plan would pave the way for further confiscations that would absorb thousands of dunums of *Palestinian land.*

The plan further entails that a number of Israeli companies would invest in an industrial project in conjunction with the Israeli civil administration and Israeli military authorities in the West Bank. Israel claims that land confiscation is necessary to construct bypass roads and security *belts in accordance* with *Israeli-Palestinian* peace agreements. But for the Palestinians, the real aim is to alter the West Bank borders.

Recent Israeli statistics, disclosed Omar, reveal that the quarry reserves in Israel will deplete in 14 years. In addition, the statistics indicated Israel's consumption of stone to be around 35 million tons in 1994, representing a 250 per cent increase in the consumption of *stone* in the *past* few years. The danger of the quarries project does not only lie in the confiscation of thousands of dunums of cultivated olive and almond farms but also in the obliteration of agricultural land and the resultant environmental destruction and pollution. In addition, the borders of Palestinian villages are being systematically altered and this will present the Palestinian negotiators with a fait accompli in the final status talks with Israel.

Essam Abdel-Latif, coordinator of the National and Islamic Committee against Settlements, said that official and popular efforts should be doubled to *confront* the wave of settlement expansion on Palestinian land. Abdel-Latif urged the Israeli peace movement to join forces with the Palestinians to halt Israeli practices that are destroying Palestinian land. He referred to a settlement plan known as "the eastern gate to Jerusalem". This plan is designed to complete the encirclement of Jerusalem by extending the boun*daries* of a number of *Jewish* settlements in the area.

Additionally, plans are under way to expand the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim, located east of East Jerusalem, by more than 12,000 dunums and the building of 6,500 housing units and 300 hotel rooms.

Abdel-Latif added that it was recently revealed that the Israeli Defence Ministry and a pro-settlement group will construct a new network of bypass roads in the West Bank that will devour large tracts of Palestinian territory. To implement this project, the Israeli authorities have already *begun to drive out thousands of Palestinian fam*ilies from East Jerusalem. Additionally, a number of settler roads that will further divide the West Bank into separate cantons are under construction in Nablus and Ramallah.

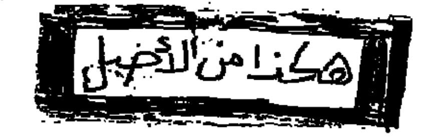
Soliman Mezarah, spokesman for the Bedouin families in the West Bank, explained that 5,000 Bedouin families are destined to be expelled ac*cording to yet another Israeli plan.*

The Bedouins, who number around 20,000, inhabit the eastern slopes of the West Bank. Mezarah said that notices were issued to the families to leave their homes and the Israeli authorities *sealed off some areas and confiscated* agricultural tools and water cisterns from their owners.

Mezarah believes that the Israeli authorities are seeking to change the demographic composition of the West Bank and block contact between Jordan and the Palestinians. Khalil Tofekgi, director of cartography at the Palestinian and Arab Studies Association, believes that the project aims to keep the Jordan Valley and the sur*rounding slopes* under *Israeli control.*

In the meantime, the intensified settlement activities in Jerusalem and its environs constitute a substantial part of the overall settlement policy in the West Bank. According to a report released by an Israeli peace *movement, Netanyahu's govern*ment recently approved the building of hundreds of houses in the West Bank as well as 2,550 new housing units in two settlements near Jerusalem.

Once these plans are implemented, says Tofekgi, "*the Palestinians will find nothing to nego*tiate about when they come to the final status negotiations."





Ayatollah Khamenei, Iran's Spiritual Guide: Will his backing for Nateq-Nouri's platform tip the scales?



Mohamed Khatemi, darling of the left and centre, has aroused the ire of conservative circles



Nateq-Nouri, representing the ultra-conservative right, has called for rapid economic liberalisation and would seek to restrict women's role in professional life

Heritage of a recalcitrant son

The presidential elections in Iran will be held tomorrow. The outcome, writes **Eric Rouleau**, may well herald a profound change for the Islamic Republic as we know it



Is the Islamic Republic of Iran on the verge of major political change? Many observers are asking the question on the eve of the presidential elections, to be held in Iran on 23 May. The electoral campaign has taken place in conditions unprecedented since Bani Sadr's election in 1981. It is true that only a few of the 238 candidates, representing a wide spectrum of opinions, have been able to travel across the country, hold public meetings or get the attention of the Farsi press. But all the candidates have been free to express themselves and reply to questions on the most sensitive topics, merrily violating the law of silence on subjects heretofore considered taboo, without being called to order or punished.

It is also true that the regime's opponents had access only to the foreign media before being pushed out of the race, and that the Council of Guardians, a body dominated by the high clergy, accepted only four candidates, considered worthy of running for the presidency of the Republic.

Two new characteristics, however, make this different from any of the five preceding elections: at least one of these "official candidates" is not really "politically correct", while the higher echelons of the state and the religious, civilian and military establishment have declared their neutrality in the race.

With the exception of Bani Sadr, elected in 1981 without the explicit support of Imam Khomeini, each of his successors obtained the patronage of the *Faqih*, the Spiritual Guide — Khomeini before Ayatollah Khamenei — therefore becoming, in practice, the regime's sole candidate.

Although some suspect Ayatollah Khamenei of backing the right-wing candidate, *hujjat-ul-Islam* Nateq-Nouri, under the table, the outcome of the two-tier ballot depends largely, at least until today, on the public's decision — unless, of course, the ballot boxes are stuffed.

At any rate, the stakes in the duel between the two favourite candidates are considerable. It is true that, were one to rely only on appearances, Nateq-Nouri and Mohamed Khatemi seem interchangeable. Both are the products of the theological seminaries of the holy city of Qom, both have philosophy degrees; both have reached the rank of *hujjat-ul-Islam*, a relatively modest position in the hierarchy of the Shi'ite clergy; they are of the same age (54) and, thanks to their ecclesiastical garb, it would be possible to mistake one for the other, were it not for Khatemi's black turban, the distinctive sign of a *sayyid* (descendant of the Prophet Mohamed), contrasting with his rival's white headgear.

In fact, they are different in every respect: their characters, careers, ideological and political convictions, even their respective visions for the future of the Islamic Republic. Of course, both have adopted an Islamic framework of reference and legitimisation, but their respective conceptions of religion, and the way they project it onto public affairs, are very different. In fact, a number of points divide them: the confrontation pits the representative of the conservative right, Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri, against Mohamed Khatemi, the standard-bearer for a heterogeneous coalition including, notably, the radical Islamic left, liberal centrists and various minority communities.

An initiative Khatemi took when announcing that he would enter the race symbolises two of the qualities that characterise him, and remain relatively rare in circles of influence: modernity and tolerance. To serve his electoral campaign, he set up a web site on the Internet. The abundance of topics and, especially, the easy access it affords are attributed to the qualifications of the Iranians residing in the US whose help he solicited. In the English section of the site, Khatemi generously included the biographies of the main candidates — except his own. That of his most dangerous rival, Nateq-Nouri, is especially flattering.

Khatemi's modesty may be justified. The son of a renowned *ayatollah* from the city of Yazd, known for his open-mindedness, Khatemi did not want to follow in his father's footsteps. A passionate student of philosophy, he began by obtaining a BA in the subject at Ispahan University, then an MA in pedagogy, before taking theology courses in Qom at his father's behest. There, he befriended another young *mullah*, Ahmed Khomeini, the son of the man who was to lead the Iranian revolution. Unlike Nateq-Nouri, he was not remarked for his hot-headed militancy. And, while his future rival for the presidency of the Republic was imprisoned several times for his activities against the Shah, Khatemi remained virtually unknown to the police. In 1978, he became director of the Islamic Centre and imam of the Hamburg mosque. One year later, the monarchy was overturned. Khatemi returned to his country, where he was elected deputy at the same time as Nateq-Nouri, and simultaneously worked as director of an influential media group, that of the daily *Keyhan*. He was soon remarked for his intellectual qualities, and especially for his cordial relations with media, literary and artistic circles. In 1982, he was placed in charge of the Ministry of National Guidance, which he directed for around 10 years, a period during which he gave considerable latitude to writers, film directors, and artists. It was also a time during which Khatemi became the target of persistent hostility among conservative ranks. In parliament and the press, the right wing berated him for his "laxity" and "indulgence" toward the "enemies of the Islamic Republic"; in one of history's little ironies, it was Nateq-Nouri himself, who had become head of Parliament in 1988, who obtained his dismissal, thinly disguised as a resignation, in 1992.

Khatemi then retired from active political life, requesting and obtaining the discreet position of director of the National Library, and devoted himself to cultural activities until his decision to join the race for the presidency. He also took advantage of this respite to reflect and elaborate, in writing and in speech, his ideas of the relation between state and individual, the economy and social questions, and the concepts of collective and individual freedoms. In this manner, he gained the backing of secular circles, and, paradoxically, that of the "servants of construction", a group of technocrats led by Hashemi Rafsanjani, the outgoing president. These groups chose not to present their own candidates to the elections. They preferred to gamble on Khatemi, better able, in their view, to beat the conservative candidate.

As for Nateq-Nouri, he was able to muster mainly the support of commercial associations and the traditional clergy, the twin support of the bazaar and the mosque, as planned. The two poles allied to block the way to Khatemi and the other "liberal" (tantamount to an insult in the vocabulary of the Islamic Republic) candidates.

The dividing line between the two candidates' programmes was clearly established; the choices presented by each of them were unambiguous. In the economic field, it was no surprise when conservative candidate Nateq-Nouri called for increased liberalisation of commercial exchange, and especially the suppression of controls on exchange rates, more widespread privatisation, and the liberalisation of the labour market. His rival, Khatemi, while also an advocate of the market economy, is opposed to the systematic dismantling of the public sector and emphasises the state's role as a regulator, responsible for ensuring a more egalitarian distribution of national income and the reduction of social inequalities, among other things. To these points, the conservative candidate replied:

"Seeking to establish social justice without first developing the economy would basically result in an equitable distribution of misery!"

The candidate of the liberal left demonstrated an astonishing degree of political courage, in the context of the Islamic Republic, when he insisted that, in order to ensure harmonious economic development, Iranians had to know how to take advantage of the West's considerable experience of modernity: "We must stop either adoring or loathing the West, as is our custom," he exclaimed in a speech delivered in May 1996, "in order to evaluate objectively the Western mode of development, with its many strong points, but also its weaknesses and drawbacks."

The second prerequisite for the construction of a healthy economy — and this is a central theme in Khatemi's election campaign — is the establishment of the rule of law and public liberties. Without these, he emphasises, economic development will never take place. "My understanding of freedom," he explained in the same speech, "is defined as follows: the freedom of thought, and the ability to express it safely, thanks to structures that guarantee both these liberties." But Khatemi has no illusions; he makes it clear that "centuries of despotism have shaped Iranians' mentality." This makes it absolutely necessary, he insists, to "cultivate a sense of dialogue and tolerance among the population", which will also be more involved in managing public affairs. Nateq-Nouri also claims that he is in favour of a multi-party system, a principle, incidentally, explicitly authorised by the Constitution, but never put into practice. It remains, however, that the candidate of the *bazaaris* and the traditional clergy has kept mum on the question of democracy, and this for good reason, since it is considered "anti-Islamic".

Khatemi has also broken new ground in another, equally sensitive field: he has begun a campaign aimed at winning over minorities, notably by visiting regions like Khuzistan, where he addressed the Arabic-speaking community, and the Western provinces, where his message was directed to the Kurds. He has promised to ensure the scrupulous application of Article 15 of the Constitution, which guarantees the fundamental rights of all religious and ethnic minorities. In this manner, he probably has gained the sympathy not only of Arab and Kurdish Iranians, but also of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian citizens, for whom the Islamic Constitution has reserved seats in Parliament.

The candidate of the left and centre is more prudent when it comes to the status of women, however, although this is one of the campaign's central themes. For the first time in the Republic's history, nine women have sought the right to run in the elections. The Council of Guardians has refused their request, but they have succeeded in arousing a national debate, thanks especially to Aazam Taleghani's decision to run as a presidential candidate. The daughter of a well-known *ayatollah*, venerated by the left, Ms Taleghani has become an emblematic figure for a number of feminist organisations which demand, in the name of Islam, full equality of the sexes, notably in terms of access to jobs and positions. She has defended the thesis that the Constitution, but also the sacred texts, in no way limit a woman's access to any profession, including the highest offices of state.

Nateq-Nouri, faithful to his ideological platform, has opposed these ideas, and added more generally that women should be kept out of professional activities which could be prejudicial to morality and the health of the family unit. As for Khatemi, he secured the backing of the main feminist organisation when he spoke out in favour of women's participation in all professional activities, including those at the highest levels. He could not go beyond this vague formula, since the Constitution, despite the assertions of Ms Taleghani's supporters, clearly reserves the presidency of the Republic to men alone.

While "politically incorrect" in the eyes of most of the religious establishment, Mohamed Khatemi, after all, still belongs to the seraglio. Not only because he is a clergyman, but also, especially, because he has not questioned the basic pillars of the Islamic Republic. The opponents of clerical power, pushed out of the race by the Council of Guardians, have taken over the task of questioning taboos. The originality of this presidential election is to be found here too: prominent figures are calling for an end to the "mullahs' reign" in all impunity. Ezzatollah Sahabi, although he is a former member of the Revolutionary Council established by Khomeini after the revolution, and Ibrahim Yazdi, the leader of the Iran Liberation Movement, have called for the abolition of the *Vilayat-i-Faqih*, the constitutionally-sanctioned institution which allows the clergy to oversee affairs of state.

There has also been a somewhat unexpected debate over which of the two powers, the "divine" or the "popular", the *faqih* (spiritual guide) or the parliament, constitutes the supreme source of legitimacy.

Sahabi, a practicing Muslim, publicly declared that "Iranians are fed up with religious authority after 18 years!", according to an English-language newspaper published in Tehran. Sahabi lost no time in inviting voters to opt for one or the other of the candidates in favour of the "separation of mosque and state". Still, the themes which virtually monopolise the attention of the Western media are barely mentioned in the electoral campaign. Tehran's attempts to "export the revolution", terrorism, the *fatwa* condemning Salman Rushdie, opposition to the Middle East peace process and, more generally, Washington's ritual accusations of the "*mullahs*' regime" have not been the subject of much debate among the candidates. Only Mohamed Khatemi has repeatedly assured that, if elected, he will put an end to "all human rights violations", while Ezzatollah Sahabi has criticised a clerical foundation for offering $2.5 million to whomever kills the "apostate" Salman Rushdie.

Electoral campaigns in Iran, as elsewhere, are almost exclusively concerned with domestic affairs, the only kind which the public really cares about. In this regard, relations with the United States have not been dwelt upon by the candidates. Despite the importance of the question, they passed over it easily, echoing a national consensus. Each in his or her own way, they declared that they were in favour of the normalisation of relations between Tehran and Washington, on condition that the "dignity and interests of the Islamic Republic be safeguarded." Nothing more was necessary, since foreign policy is not the exclusive province of the president of the Republic, but of a council on which he serves as one of the members.

So, is the Islamic Republic on the threshold of a major political change?

"We are passing through a transitional period leading to historic change," affirms Ibrahim Yazdi, in spite of the fact that his candidacy was rejected by the Council of Guardians. At any rate, this sixth presidential election reveals a profound change in Iranian public opinion, one which has been developing for several years. Traumatised by the war with Iraq (1980-'88), which, despite enormous sacrifices — several hundred thousand dead — resulted in a humiliating compromise, still reeling from the financial scandals and corruption which tainted the nomenklatura, and disappointed by economic management and social conditions, Iranians have ultimately begun to question, if not the regime, then at least its figureheads.

Khomeini's death in 1989, leaving no charismatic heir, speeded up the development of a new awareness, reflected in the presidential elections among other phenomena. Will these elections lead to a "second Republic", the post-Khomeini era? Much, if not all, depends on who will be the new president of the Republic.

Translated from French by **Pascale Ghazaleh**



Women at the ballot box: The Iranian election campaign has given rise to a heated debate over women's participation in political life



Outgoing President Rafsanjani: The end of an era?



Bani Sadr: The only candidate since the revolution elected without the backing of the *Faqih*

Al-Ahram Weekly 22 - 28 May 1997

Unraveling Kabila's conundrum

Adieu Zaire, welcome back the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Kinshasa's residents are euphoric as African-style people power takes root, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**

The Zeitgeist creates its own leaders. Laurent Désiré Kabila has become an almost mythical *figure in the annals of contemporary* African politics. Many Congolese see him as Patrice Lumumba's reincarnation, or at least as the vindication of the Lumumbist cause. Lumumba was the Congo's first democratically elected prime minister after he led his country to independence. *Kabila sees himself as Lumumba's* political heir.

The five million inhabitants of Kinshasa, the capital, watched history being stood on its head as Kabila read out what sounded like a victory speech from his Lubumbashi stronghold. Lubumbashi, the second largest city in the country, is the capital of mineral-rich Katanga, formerly the Shaba Province. "I am happy, very happy to succeed," Kabila *announced triumphantly* last Saturday, when he received news that his troops fully controlled Kinshasa. Kabila, the leader of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (ADFL), declared himself president of the country re-baptised as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the original name of the vast central African nation. Former President Mobutu Sese Seku had changed the name to *Zaire in 1971. The ousted president* and his retinue fled from the country in disgrace.

The United States immediately recognised the new government and conceded that it had been working with the ADFL. US State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns stated that Washington "maintained contact" with the ADFL through the good offices of its Ambassador to the United Nations, Bill Richardson. Speaking to the television network CNN, White House National Security Adviser Sandy Berger said that Washington was urging Kabila to "respect human *rights." Berger also stressed* that Washington wants Kabila to "form a government that is inclusive and ultimately to move towards democracy."

Kabila is not dragging his feet on the democratisation of the country. He formed a transitional government within 72 hours of *the fall of Kinshasa and promised* that within 60 days the country would have a new constitution. However, the message from the new Congo clearly is that the democratisation process will be presided over by the reassuring figure of Kabila. Zaire, now Congo, will never be the same again. The Zairean national anthem, *La Zairoise*, was promptly replaced by the country's first post-independence national anthem, *Debout Congolais* (*Stand up*, you Congolese) and the national radio was renamed the Voice of the People. Kabila has indicated his admiration for the Chinese model, an open economy coupled with an authoritarian political system.

Received as liberators, the ADFL troops in Kinshasa left the mobs to administer rough justice. Well-known supporters and associates of former President Mo*butu were rounded up and singled* out for retribution. Mobutu's benchmen were given the necklace or burning tyre treatment. There was much jubilation in the streets of the capital as crowds danced around the charred remains of former government troops. "Liberté," the masses wearing white headbands chanted. Otherwise, the transition of power was a very smooth affair.

With over 250 ethnic groups, a population of almost 50 million and a land mass larger than Western Europe, Congo is undoubtedly a difficult country to govern. If Congo's own history is any guide, the omens for the future are *favourable*. Prophets of doom see signs of an inauspicious turn of events because Kabila declined to set a timetable for elections, but Kabila also announced on Monday that anti-Mobutu opposition figures will be included in his transitional government. Etienne Tshisekedi's Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) is called upon to play a low-key role. The exact strength of the UDPS will be *determined when* free and fair elections are held, some say later in the year. Kabila's takeover is not the coup to which Tshisekedi would once have aspired. Kabila's takeover is virtually a revolution.

In Kinshasa's plush Binza district, the opulent mansion of the son of the *ousted* president, the feared and loathed Kongolo Mobutu — nicknamed Saddam Hussein in Kinshasa — was ran*sacked by the maddened mobs as* ADFL troops looked on. Mobutu's own residence was likewise trashed. Among the letters that littered his study was an order to an Israeli weapons firm for a large consignment of Uzi sub-machine guns and silencers. The Mobutus did brisk business with Israeli arms dealers. Kongolo's collection of some 50 luxury cars were ferried across the Congo river to Brazzaville, the capital of the neighbouring state also called Congo.



A Zairean woman soldier surrenders to Kabila's forces and throws in her lot with Kinshasa's conquerors whom she entertains with an impromptu dance *(photo: AFP)*

Nearly all of Congo's neighbours welcomed the change of power in Kinshasa. Even neighbouring Gabon, whose authoritarian ruler, President Omar Bongo, was long considered a close Mobutu ally, refused to grant landing permission to Kongolo's plane. Tanzania, Congo's eastern neighbour, was the first country to recognise Kabila's new government. Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda followed suit. Angola and South Africa, too, commended the "smooth takeover".

South African Deputy President Thabo Mbeki flew to Lubumbashi on Sunday to meet with Kabila. Mbeki was accompanied by South African Defence Minister Joe Modise, Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo and Nzo's deputy Aziz Pahad. The high-powered South African delegation was the first from a foreign country since the Kabila takeover. It highlighted the special commercial, strategic and political importance of Congo to South Africa. In the last two months, these unlikely bed*fellows have worked their way to* the top of the list of politically important African nations. Between them, South Africa and the Congo produce a considerable chunk of the mineral wealth of Africa. Their strategic alliance is likely to have far-reaching effects throughout the continent.

In France, President Chirac drew a more aggressive lesson from Kabila's overwhelming victory: France is fast losing its African empire. France long propped up Mobutu's regime and French officials expressed concern that the ADFL showed no interest in a negotiated settlement with Mobutu. The French will have to brush up on their *English if they want to do business* with the new Congo — like Rwanda, another predominantly Francophone African country, Congo's new leaders are Anglophone and pro-American.

What then will happen to the new Democratic Congo is anybody's guess. Kabila has inherited from Mobutu a budget deficit that is too big for any government to handle. The Congolese economy is in a shambles after 30 years *of Mobutu's* kleptomaniac rule. Acting on Kabila's orders, Switzerland has frozen Mobutu's $4.5 billion worth of assets in Swiss bank accounts and real estate.

The prospects for an about-turn seem very promising, however. The high-value so-called "prostate notes" are no longer legal tender in the country. In Kinshasa, the people no longer deal in "prostates", an un*flattering reference to the disease* that ravages the ailing ousted leader. A new currency is shortly to come into circulation. Kabila has called for a meeting between leading Congolese businessmen and ADFL leaders. Some of the country's wealthiest families fled the country in the aftermath of Mobutu's demise, but many others stayed. Kabila has the unanimous support of the country's poor, but he does want to curry favour with Congo's rich, too.

White lies, black marks

Mohamed Sabreen in Johannesburg looks into the findings of South Africa's truth commission and the prospects of racial reconciliation in the country

Innumerable applications continue to flow steadily to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. On Saturday 10 May, the closing submission date, 8,000 applications seeking pardon from crimes involving human rights violations committed during the apartheid era had already been received. *The Commission is now facing* the tremendous task of browsing through thousands of pages of testimony to determine the guilt or innocence of the pardon seeker. It is becoming increasingly doubtful that the Commission will be able to complete its work within the scheduled remaining 99 days. Judge Hassan Mall, chairman of the Commission asserted, "I *wish I could say I am confident*, but I'm not at all."

Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Nobel Peace Prize-laureate, recently declared that the period assigned for the Commission to conclude its work may be extended until next year, though this has not yet been officially confirmed. Such extension would require a bill to be approved by Parliament.

While the Truth Commission workers are engaged in sorting out the amnesty applications, hearing sessions started for the political parties which submitted their reports and answers to questions previously put to them by the Commission. The sessions with the leadership of the governing African National Congress (ANC) saw many unexpected developments.

In response to previous accusations, Thabo Mbeki, vice-president of the Republic and deputy chairman of the ANC, asserted that, in the 1980s, the ANC leaders refused to take part in a conspiracy to murder Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party. He also stated that the ANC had no military policy relating to Inkatha and that the military intelligence of the South African defence forces were the ones trying to spread the rumour that Buthelezi would be killed in a conspiracy plotted by the ANC.

Many mysteries remain unresolved, however. Last August, the ANC submitted a confidential annex listing the names of double agents within the ANC who had worked *for the previous apartheid government*. Contrary to what the ANC had previously demanded, the leaders of the governing party recently asked that these names be withheld. The minister of transport and a member of the executive committee of the ANC, Mac Maharag, asserted that the ANC now considers the public disclosure of those names to be a sensitive issue.

Responding to horror stories of ANC cadres being brutalised in the ANC training camps in Angola in the 1980s, Thabo Mbeki, South Africa's deputy president, asserted *that* most *of these detainees* were traitors. He added that they were not subject to inhumane treatment, indicating thereby that the ANC felt that there was nothing to hide concerning those camps.

Engaged in the thankless task of disclosing the truth about past events in the hope of achieving reconciliation, the Commission has been, and will be for a long time, *subject* to accusations of bias. Additionally, the findings of the Truth Commission have aroused a multitude of contradictory sentiments among the South African people who are compelled to live with the after-effects of the now abolished apartheid policy. Among the known figures who refused to submit an application for amnesty are former presidents P.W. Botha and F.W. de Clerk, the defence and foreign ministers, Magnus Malan and Pik Botha respectively, as well as Winnie Mandela, the former wife of South African President Nelson Mandela, and Buthelezi.

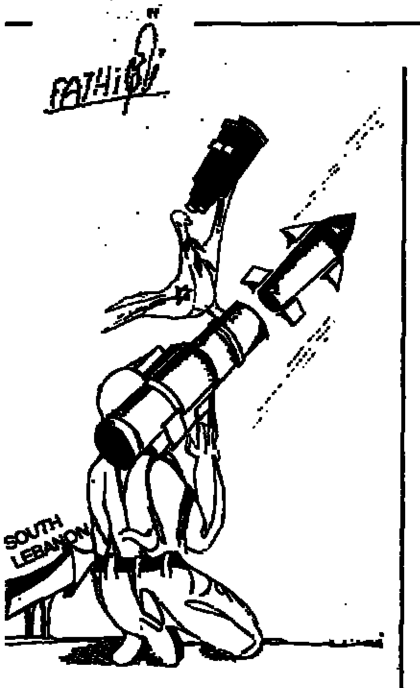
Magnus Malan recently informed the Truth Commission that, as a Christian, he believes that forgiving sins is the prerogative of God solely. For his part, Bu*thelezi condemned* Bishop *Desmond* Tutu's call for him to visit the site of a massacre where 13 people were murdered in Kwa Makhuta and offer his apologies to the victims' families. Buthelezi explained that he had already apologised for the acts of violence perpetrated by members of the Inkhata Freedom Party in the course of a business breakfast in *Durban in* 1991 and again last year when he submitted his party's report to the Truth Commission. More than 420 members of the Inkhata and thousands of his supporters were liquidated because they were opposed to his confrontational and violent struggle strategy.

Hendrik Jacobus Steynk, a former policeman and member of the Inkhata, shot and killed two members of the ANC while they were in police detention. Last August, he confessed to the Commission.

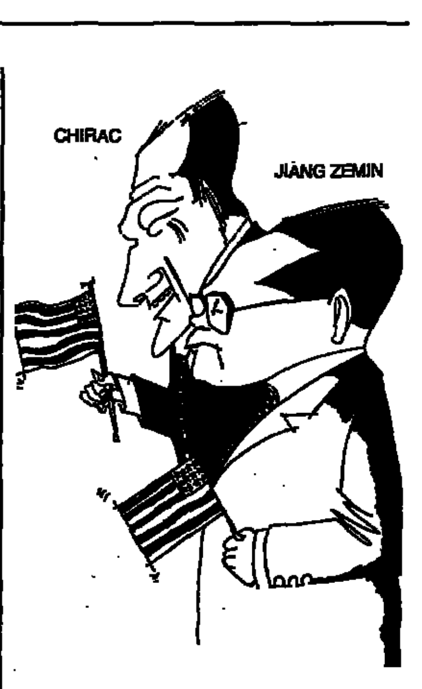
The applications received by the Commission involve some high-ranking personalities but the majority of applications come from average citizens who found themselves caught in a cycle of violence. Tragically enough, these people may be looked upon, at one and the same time, as culprits and victims. They were the victims of a racist system but retaliated against it by sometimes striking against white people as well as black people.

The insistence of the ANC not to disclose the names of the "fifth column" agents within its ranks raises a number of questions about the real motives for the establishment of the Truth Commission. Some suspect that the ANC is not seeking to get at the truth but is engaged in a witch-hunt. In other words, the ANC's objective *is the moral, if not political, defamation of* their opponents.

FATHI







Diseases rising in developing world

Developing countries are becoming increasingly vulnerable to chronic diseases as old enemies make a comeback and new ones begin their attack. **Mariz Tadros** investigates

It's been just over two years since Zaire witnessed a deadly outbreak of the Ebola hemorrhagic fever, which cost over 300 lives. A year later health officials announced that the epidemic was under *control and the threat over. But this was* just one tragedy — more than 30 new highly-infectious diseases have been identified throughout the world in the last 20 years and old diseases, thought to be consigned to history books, are making a deadly comeback.

Malaria, tuberculosis, cholera and yellow fever — to mention but a few — are *spreading. And spreading fast. If the* current incidence rate of TB continues, at least 30 million people worldwide will die from it within the next 10 years. Already, a third of the world's population is infected with TB — mostly in South-East Asia, the Western Pacific and Africa. The epidemic, which is transmitted through air droplets, is spreading most rapidly in countries *saddled* with large populations, overcrowding, rampant poverty and limited public health care.

According to World Health Organ*isation (WHO) figures, in Pakistan only* 25 per cent of all new TB cases are ever diagnosed, while 210,000 new cases are identified every year. In India, more than two million people develop active TB every year and half a million people die from it. Almost the same number of new TB cases are seen annually in Indonesia.

A cure for TB is available, best administered through the Directly Observed Treatment Short Course (DOTS) whereby health workers or volunteers are asked to supervise a patient's regular taking of medicine during the full period of treatment. However, drug-resistant strands of *the disease are appearing*, and it's not just true of TB, warned Zuhair Hallaj, WHO regional adviser for communicable diseases control. "A micro-organism takes one year to develop resistance to an anti*biotic. It takes 10 years to develop a new* antibiotic, so the micro-organisms are in the lead at the moment."

Finding financial backers for new research is difficult. Pharmaceutical companies don't want to put resources into a 10-year research scheme for an antibiotic that may be outdated in a year's time. It is not just a *question* of availability of *treatment. In Somalia for instance, Hallaj* pointed out, TB medicine is readily available but money is the problem. The reduction of resources spent on public health may have something to do with the re-emergence of many diseases which were thought to have been eradicated. It might be acceptable to secure adequate health care through health insurance in advanced countries, but in developing countries, "the public sector should remain responsible for preventative medicine," said Hallaj. "Health services *should be seen as essential to* development, otherwise epidemics will continue to grow," he added.

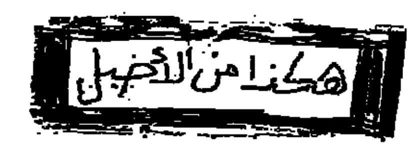
Resettlement, with people leaving their homeland in *quest* of a better life or driven from their homes due to civil war, is spreading diseases. "You have great population movements which lead to diseases moving to new areas. People acquire diseases which were not present in their previous dwelling such as when you have a population movement of the scale existing in the Horn of Africa," said Hallaj.

The deterioration of water and sanitation systems in under-developed areas has acted as a catalyst for the re-emergence of a cholera epidemic. In Peru, 300,000 persons were *infected* with cholera in 1991 alone, causing 3,000 deaths. Deforestation and the penetration *of uninhabited areas also carry a high risk* of exposure to new diseases. Global warming is opening up new breeding grounds for carriers of diseases, such as mosquitoes. "The latitudes of breeding grounds are shifting wider apart. In Latin America, for instance, the dengue fever — a disease causing high temperature, muscle ache and headache — was limited to certain coastal areas. Now *it is* moving and spreading inside the continent," said Hallaj.

The rapid spread of HIV, especially in Africa, is helping infectious diseases to progress. At the end of 1996 there were over 418,000 reported cases of AIDS in the African continent, which has 35.7 per cent of the world's infected population. Between 1990 and 1996, the rate of HIV infection grew from seven cases per 100,000 to 30.

"Most people in developing countries are infected with micro-bacterium tuberculosis but only one tenth develop the disease during their lifetime," said Hallaj. "When they become infected with HIV and TB between 70-90 *per cent develop* full-blown TB. TB is the main killer of HIV positive people," he added.

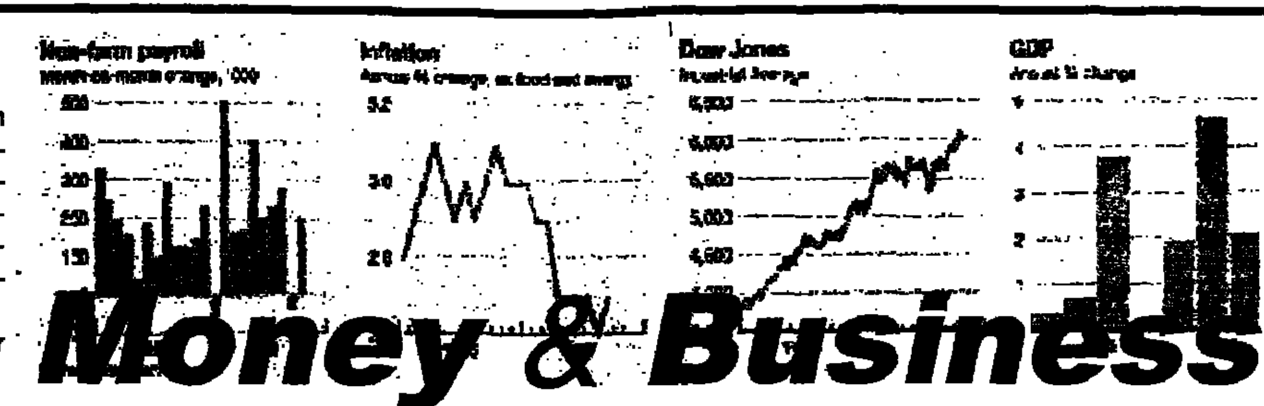
"It is more worrying if you do not know the HIV status of the patient," said Purushottam Shrestha, WHO regional adviser on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). "Treatment tends to be costly and rigorous. Sometimes a patient is obliged to take up to 30 pills a day to treat AIDS-related infections."



Minister of finance in investment seminar

The 6th October University organised a seminar on investment on Tuesday, in which Dr Mohieddin Gharib, finance minister, took part. Other participating dignitaries were; Dr Mahmoud Mahfouz, Dr Samir Badawi, president of the university, and Dr Abdel-Rahman Allan, dean of the faculty of economic studies.

The seminar discussed the customs laws and their effect on investment in the Egyptian market.



Citibank base rate changed

The need for a market determined reference rate for pricing loans arose with the development of the Egyptian Financial Markets in size and sophistication.

Clients will be quoted the base rate plus a spread. The board of Citibank has changed the previously set base rate of 9.75 per cent to 9.5 per cent. Whenever other changes are required, Citibank will announce them immediately.

Egyptian-German summit reviews peace process and German investments in Egypt

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa stated that the agenda of the Egyptian-German summit included means of boosting bilateral ties, particularly in the economic field.

He added that President Mubarak and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl discussed the Middle East peace process, the European role in salvaging peace and how Germany in particular, as one of the leading European nations, can help in saving peace.

The two leaders agreed on the importance of integrating the European and American roles in order to push forward the stalled peace process.

Boosting German investments in Egypt, particularly in Sinai and the New Valley project, was one of the other issues discussed as well as the Mubarak-Kohl educational programme.

Mahmoud Mubarak, Egyptian ambassador to Germany, said that the historical German-Egyptian ties are based on mutual respect and friendship. He added that the talks, which focused on boosting economic ties between the two countries, are expected to bear fruit in implementing the Mubarak-Kohl project for education.


Strengthening ties: President Mubarak and Chancellor Kohl greet each other warmly at the Egyptian-German summit in Bonn

Mahmoud Mubarak further explained that Germany is the second largest exporter to Egypt and provides the greatest number of tourists visiting the country. This makes up for the imbalance in commercial exchange which sways in favour of Germany.

Faisal Bank finances construction projects

Faisal Bank was launched in 1977 to foster the Egyptian *economy and provide the* best banking services in line with the rules of *Shari'a* (Islamic law).

To better serve its clients, Faisal Bank adopted a strategy aimed at solving the nation's housing problems. *Hence, the Bank has always* been keen to provide financing for major contracting companies which boast a distinguished record of construction projects.

Financing from Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt was provided *for 13,000 flats* in the following projects:

* Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt's project in Sidi Bishr, *Alexandria, which comprises* 8,600 flats as well as schools and shopping centres in the area to the cost of LE250 million.

* 6,600 flats with a shopping centre in Agha Khan 24-*storey towers in Cairo*, with a total cost of LE130 million.

* 557 flats, in eight buildings, in *Faisal Bank's* project on King Faisal Street, Giza, as well as six buildings, shops and garages in Al Safa Al Marwa project in the Pyramid's area (Haram).

* Faisal Bank's tower in Galaa Street, Dokki, to the cost of LE150 million.

* New urban cities projects include; Golf City in El-Obour, Green Land and May Fair in Sherouk and Garden Park and Rabwa in 6th October City.

Similar projects on the Northern Coast include Wadi El-Nakhil, El Roda El-Khadraa in Agami and Alam El- Roum in Marsa Matrouh.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Time for some results

Strategic alliances are of critical importance as we rush towards the 21st century. We live in a global village, but there is still the need to collaborate with countries whose people share similar aspirations, near identical development concerns, and a shared history of suffering colonial oppression. We have no option but to *intensify our* efforts to strengthen political and economic ties with African and Arab natioens. Small wonder, then, that Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, just back from an East African tour, is shortly to embark on yet another African trip — this time to southern Africa.

In Zimbabwe's capital Harare, Moussa is due to attend an Organisation of African Unity meeting. High on the agenda will be economic integration *in Africa and the establishment* of an African Common Market. African economic disunity is sapping vital energy which should be directed to the building of Africa's political and economic strength. It would help put an end to what has become known internationally as Afro-pessimism. It would generate confidence. We must combine strategy and tactics, and establish the institutional mechanism for increasing economic cooperation between African and Arab countries.

One area of potential for such cooperation may be emerging on the continent today. Zaire went away with Mobutu. The future of Congo under the leadership of Laurent Désiré Kabila has now become a little clearer. Kabila is no stranger to Egypt. When he was injured battling Mobutu in 1965, he was flown to Cairo to be operated upon to remove a bullet from his leg. The operation proved successful and Kabila made his mark at the Zamalek-based African Society. He was one of many African freedom fighters who came to Cairo in the 1960s to further the anti-colonial struggle.

Stability in contemporary Congo is an opportunity for Africa to demonstrate a regional capacity for cooperation. Mobutu first came up with the idea of a League of Black African States, which had it seen daylight, would have driven a dangerous wedge between Africa north and south of the Sahara. Thankfully, the idea came to naught. It is high time for some results in African economic integration.

Al-Ahram Offices

Main office
AL-AHRAM, Al-Galaa St. Cairo.
Telephones: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500. Direct: 5786064
Telex: 20185/93346 Fax:5786089 /5786833
E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

Overseas offices

USA
Washington DC: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1258, 529 National Press Bldg, Washington DC 20045; Tel: (202)-737-2121/2122.
New York: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, 39th Fl., Chrysler Bldg., 405 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10174-0300; Tel: (212)972 6440; Telex: 497 9426 ITT U.I.; Fax: (212) 286 0285.
Los Angeles: Soraya Aboul Seoud, 600 S. Curson Ave., 402 LA, CA 90036, USA; Tel: (213)-857-0941; Fax: (213)-857-7084.

Russia
Moscow: Abdel-Malek Khalil, Ahram Office, Kutuzovski Pro Dom 7/4 Kv. 50, Moscow; Tel: 243 4014/ 243 1424; Fax: 230 2879

Canada
Montreal: Mustafa Samy Sadek, Al-Ahram Office, 800 Rene-Levesque Blvd, West Suite 2440, Montreal H3B IX9, Quebec; Tel: (514)876 7825 Fax: (514) 876 9262/ (514)876 7825.

United Kingdom
London: Amr Abdel-Samie, Al-Ahram Office, 203 - 209 North Gower street London NW1 2NJ
Tel: 0171 388 1155, Fax: 0171 388 3130

France
Paris: Sherif El-Shoubashy, Bureau Al-Ahram 26, Rue Marbeuf, 75008 Paris; Tel: (1) 537 72700; Al-Ahram F.; Fax: (1) 428-93963.

Germany
Frankfurt: Mohamed Eissa El-Sharkawi, Al-Ahram Bureau Friedrichstr. 15, 60323 Frankfurt, Tel: (069) 9714380/ (069) 9714381 Fax: (069) 729571.

Austria
Vienna: Mustafa Abdalla, 2331 Vosendorf Orts Str. 253; Tel: 692965/ 694805; Telex: 13 2726 GIGI A; Telefax: 694805.

Greece
Athens: Abdel-Azim Darwish, 69 Solonos St., Third floor, Kolonaki 106-79, Athens, Greece. Tel. and Fax :3634503.

Japan
Tokyo: Mohamed El-Dessouki, Duke Aoyama 4-11, Higashi 4 - Chome Shibuya - Ku, Room 402, Tokyo; Tel: (03) 340 63944; Fax: (03) 340 6625

Italy
Mustafa Abdallah [S.A.B. 2000] 00191 ROMA-V. Guido Bant, 34. Tel: 3332250 Fax: 3332294

Brazil
Rio de Janeiro: Ahmed Shedid, Cx. Postal 2395, CEP. 20001.

South Africa
Johannesburg: Mohamed Sabreen, Oxford Manor, 196 Oxford road-Northland 2116, Johannesburg. Tel.and Fax: (011)4477425.

Annual Subscription Rates

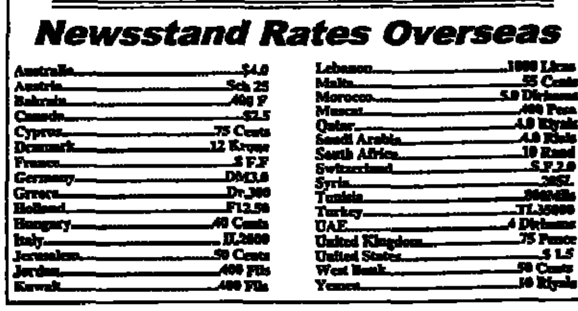
Egypt..........LE39.00
Arab Countries..........$60.00
Other Countries..........$150.00
Send your subscription order to:
Al-Ahram Subscriptions Department,
Al-Galaa St. Cairo, Egypt.
Subscription payments can be made directly in cash or by *cheque to the same address.*

Name..........

Mailing Address..........

Newsstand Rates Overseas

Australia	$4.0	Lebanon	1000 Liras
Austria	Sch 25	Malta	55 Cents
Bahrain	400 F	Morocco	5.0 Dirhams
Canada	$2.5	Muscat	400 Pesa
Cyprus	75 Cents	Qatar	4.0 Riyals
Denmark	12 Krone	Saudi Arabia	4.0 Riyals
France	5 F.F	South Africa	10 Rand
Germany	DM3.0	Switzerland	S.F 2.0
Greece	Dr.300	Syria	20SL
Holland	F12.50	Tunisia	900Mills
Hungary	40 Cents	Turkey	TL35000
Italy	IL2000	UAE	4 Dirhams
Jerusalem	50 Cents	United Kingdom	75 Pence
Jordan	400 Fils	United States	$ 1.5
Kuwait	400 Fils	West Bank	50 Cents
		Yemen	10 Riyals







The roads to integration

Already Egypt's infrastructure provides surplus capacity. By developing inter-Arab energy and communications networks that capacity will benefit all Arabs, writes Ibrahim Nafie

While an advanced and integrated infrastructure is a prerequisite for achieving substantial economic growth within individual countries, the existence of infrastructures linking countries together is also essential for the development of economic relations. Without such linkage the movement of commodities, services and elements of production across borders is severely hampered, while transportation and insurance costs may well become prohibitive.

For the Arab world, particularly, it has become a matter of some urgency to develop such an integrated infrastructure in order to allow the region to move beyond the current position where inter-Arab trade *represents only eight per cent of the* Arab world's total trade. And what is more, this already modest figure becomes even lower once we take in to account the fact that a number of imported components are included within the percentage.

There can be little doubt that the absence of an *advanced infrastructure connecting Arab countries* has profoundly detrimental consequences for both inter-Arab trade and tourism. Any talk about Arab economic integration that fails to take this on board will remain just pie in the sky until the necessary infrastructural developments are in place.

Such developments include the complete overhaul and updating of maritime, land and air routes. It is also imperative that Arab countries integrate their electricity, telecommunications and information networks, given that in today's world economic progress has become increasingly dependent on access to advanced information technologies.

Regarding the development of maritime routes: a number of major ports are in need of development so as to improve their handling capabilities and capacity. Several ports in the Arab world are perfectly situated to act as a crossroads between Europe and our own region. With improved rail links between North African countries, the hinterland of the region's ports can be considerably extended, allowing the ports of Tunisia, Libya and Algeria to serve as transit points for considerable volumes of Arab-European trade.

As far as Egypt is concerned — at the crossroads of the Maghreb and Mashreq — several ports, including Port Said, Safaga, Suez and Alexandria could be developed into important storage and transit centres for inter-Arab trade between the Maghreb and Mashreq, between the Maghreb and Europe and North America, and between the Maghreb and South East Asia and East Africa.

The Arabian peninsula ports of Jeddah and Yanbaa could also play an important role in linking North Africa with the Gulf. Aden also has a potentially important role as a storage and transit station for trade between North Africa on the one hand and the Gulf and South and East Asia on the other. Aden could also play a role in facilitating trade between the Gulf and Iraq and East Africa, Europe and the Americas. As for Dubai and Abu Dhabi, they are well positioned as storage and transit centres for trade between the Gulf, Iraq and Iran and North Africa, Europe, East Asia and the Americas.

Now that the civil war has ended, Beirut — once the Arab world's preeminent centre of trade — can once again assume an important role in trade between the Mashreq, the Gulf and Europe and North America. The same can be said for the Syrian ports of Latakia and Tartous.

For these ports to realise their full potential in energising both inter-Arab trade, and Arab trade further afield, requires a level of co-ordination and reorganisation capable of allowing the region's great ports to act as dynamic transportation centres.

The development of overland transportation networks is also essential to the region's economic prospects. Egyptian proposals presented at last year's MENA III Cairo Summit represent a blueprint for developing strategic overland trade routes. Starting with the westernmost extremity of the Arab Maghreb, a road, beginning in the Moroccan city of Oyoum, connects with Cairo via Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. To upgrade and develop the 7,000 km road will cost an estimated $850 million. The upgrading of the road within Egypt has already been completed: what remains is to develop the *remaining length of the road into* a four lane highway traversing the Maghreb.

Egypt's central position, with road links between Cairo and Gaza, via El-Arish, and via Nuweiba or Taba and Aqaba to Amman, Syria Lebanon and Turkey, could be further enhanced by the building of a suspension bridge across the Tiran Straits, linking Ras Nusrani in Egypt to Ras Hamid in Saudi Arabia. The 15.6 km suspension bridge carries an estimated price tag of $3.6 milliard and will take some five years to build.

Despite the huge cost of the project, its realisation would represent a vast leap in the region's infrastructure. Should the necessary finance for the project not be forthcoming, the only other option is to upgrade and modernise ferry services between Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

The development of a supra-national electric grid could also prove of inestimable benefit to the Arab world. Given that the Arab world spans several *time zones,* such a project would allow for the efficient use of surplus electricity. In the long run it would lower unit costs, reduce the size of the energy reserves individual states maintain while simultaneously retaining their capacity to provide energy during emergencies.

Egypt has, since 1982, already spent some $50 milliard on infrastructure projects covering transport, electricity, housing and communications. Capacity in several areas has an in built surplus of between 20-30 per cent. Projects already planned will further increase Egypt's surplus capacity, placing it in a position, given the necessary links, to export surplus energy at non-peak times.

Developing an *integrated* and *coherent* inter-Arab infrastructure, it should now be apparent, is essential in encouraging increased volumes of trade and in allowing Arab producers an edge in international markets. And its political dividends are likely to be as great as the economic benefits, dispelling misunderstandings as the Arab world becomes, in the long run, a single, *integrated* socio-economic entity capable of encompassing autonomous states.

Netanyahu's final settlement

In the light of Yossi Beilin's attempt to chart the course of the final Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, Mohamed Sid-Ahmed probes what to expect from Netanyahu

Israel's last Labour foreign minister, General Ehud Barak, is being nominated to succeed Shimon Peres as party leader. This is not surprising because Barak, who is on the right of Peres, is perceived as better equipped than any of the other candidates to compete with Netanyahu for the votes of Israeli middle-of-the-roaders. But a more interesting development on the Israeli political scene has been the active role played by Yossi Beilin, another candidate for leadership of the Labour Party who is considered to be on Peres' left.

Shortly before Rabin's assassination, Beilin and Arafat's top assistant Abu Mazen drafted a joint document aimed at identifying how much common ground could exist between the protagonists in preparation for the final stage of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Following the assassination, the document was shelved and has not been discussed since. Still, it can serve as a frame of reference for a possible agreement between Israel's Labour Party and the Palestinian Authority.

More recently, Beilin was a co-signatory, with Netanyahu's close associate, Michael Eitan, of a joint position document on the final stage of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations which unlike the first document, was published but, like the first, was not officially endorsed. Taken together, the two documents are indicative of the limits on Israel's readiness for accommodation. And, with Netanyahu at the helm, Israel *is expected to be even less accommodating* to the Palestinians.

The opening sentence in the document issued jointly by the two Israeli parties makes the Zionist project its basic frame of reference: "The primary objective of Zionism, since its inception, has been to create a sovereign Jewish state in Eretz Israel. In 1948, the state of Israel was established, but it was not until 1977 that the first Arab state, Egypt, recognised and signed a peace treaty with Israel." The Abu Mazen-Beilin document makes the Oslo Accords, i.e., Oslo I and Oslo II, the frame of reference and, according to the Beilin-Eitan document, these accords represent a compromise solution on the part of the Zionist state, which had to "relinquish a part of the Fatherland", viz. Palestinian territories still under Israeli occupation.

Actually, the Oslo Accords which the two Israeli parties describe as a 'concession' are being used to justify disregarding resolutions concerning the conflict that are adopted by any third party, be it the United Nations, the Security Council, or any other authority embodying international legitimacy, when they run counter to the provisions of these accords. Taking matters even further, Netanyahu has frozen the peace process altogether, limiting his thrust to activating the construction of Jewish settlements throughout Palestinian territory, notably the Har Homa settlement on Jebel Abu Ghneim in Arab East Jerusalem.

While the Beilin-Eitan document strongly asserts that there will be no return to the 1967 borders, the Abu Mazen-Beilin document talks of placing only 50 per cent of the West Bank under the control of the Palestinian Authority, and dividing the other 50 per cent into two categories: the 20 per cent on which there is already a strong concentration of Jewish settlements to be *annexed to Israel, and the 30 per cent* on which there are not enough settlements to justify immediate annexation to be placed for a trial period of at most twenty years under Israeli sovereignty, at the end of which it will be transferred to the Palestinian Authority, provided the settlers are not required to waive their Israeli citizenship. Instead, they will be offered the choice of either retaining two nationalities, Israeli and Palestinian, or of continuing to live in the area as foreign, i.e., Israeli, nationals. The settlements will not be dismantled throughout the trial period; if they are dismantled thereafter, it will be in consideration of "adequate compensation". Eventually, an exchange of land between Israel and the Palestinian entity could be considered in order to maintain a distance between overpopulated Palestinian areas and Israeli settlements. In no case will Israeli settlers be required to abandon, displace or dismantle their settlements, nor to give up their nationality. Israel will retain the River Jordan as its security border, which means that Israeli troops will be stationed along its banks, in a capacity still to be determined.

On the subject of Jerusalem, the Eitan-Beilin document emphatically asserts that unified Jerusalem will remain Israel's eternal capital. While the Abu Mazen-Beilin document not only confirms this but also calls on the Palestinian side to accept a unified Jerusalem as Israel's exclusive capital, it proposes the creation of a new town outside the present municipal limits of Jerusalem to be named Al-Quds and to serve as the administrative centre and capital of the Palestinian entity. Another proposal put forward by the document is the designation of a major Palestinian city, e.g. Ramallah, as the capital of the Palestinian entity. All these proposals are assumed not to impede the right of *access to the holy places in Jerusalem* by worshippers of all faiths.

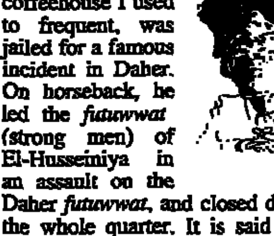
On the subject of refugees, the Abu Mazen-Beilin document calls for the replacement of UNRWA by another organisation and proposes that non-resident Palestinians should have the right to enter Palestinian territories as visitors, that is, on temporary visas that may not be converted into permanent residence permits, under the pretext of not disturbing the demographic balance or disrupting political stability. While not requiring Israel to define which Palestinian expatriates are eligible for temporary visas, the document authorises it to check the proper implementation of this provision.

Thus for all that Beilin is attributed to the left-wing of the Labour Party, the two documents he signed boil down to an attempt to containing the Palestinian problem and removing it as an obstacle in the way of Israel's security, rather than a genuine attempt to address the Palestinian claim as a legitimate cause worthy of recognition and resolution. Both documents confirm Israel's prerogative to subject the Palestinian entity to inspection and to revoke its agreements with the Palestinians if they violate the provisions of these agreements or are accused by Israel, rightly or wrongly, of violating them — a prerogative that constitutes a *permanent infringement of Palestinian* sovereignty.

If this is the stand of the moderate Beilin on the ultimate settlement of the conflict, what can we expect from Netanyahu, the leader of the Israeli right? The Israeli prime minister has repeatedly asserted that Israel should not feel committed to the course followed by the peace process so far, and proposes that instead of an interim period to be followed by a final stage, negotiations should leap directly to a package deal, *which he describes as a second* 'Camp David agreement' for the Palestinians to take or to leave. In other words, he believes the time has come to test the readiness of the parties to accept a final settlement that though attributed to peace, will not be based on the 'land-for-peace' trade off, or any other of the 'concessions' accepted by Peres and formulated by Beilin.

Last man standing

By Naguib Mahfouz



Mu'allim Urabi, the owner of the coffeehouse I used to frequent, was jailed for a famous incident in Daher. On horseback, he led the *futuwwat* (strong men) of El-Husseiniya in an assault on the Daher *futuwwat*, and closed down the whole quarter. It is said that Mu'allim Urabi personally gouged out the eyes of the leading *futuwwa* of Daher, and that the police had to intervene and seal off the area to terminate the battle. Mu'allim Urabi was given a 20-year prison sentence. An end was put to the *futuwwat* protection system as a result of this incident. Mu'allim Urabi was the last of the *futuwwat*. He eventually was released on parole and became the owner of the coffee shop I have mentioned.

All the *futuwwat* in my novels were based on different pictures of Mu'allim Urabi. I knew him only as a silent man, sitting quietly in his coffee shop. I was always struck by the contrast between the tales I had heard about Mu'allim Urabi and the actual personality of the man after his release from prison. I frequented his coffee shop until his death.

His children tried hard to run the coffee shop in the same way as their father, but never succeeded. Before long they sold it off, and the place was turned into a furniture shop, thus bringing to an end a whole page of history.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week — Turkey and the octopus

Al-Mussawar: "Cairo has time and again attempted to open the doors of dialogue between the Arab world and Turkey and to dispel mutual suspicions. President Mubarak has exerted great efforts to narrow differences between the two sides and to enhance Arab-Turkish understanding. Turkey today is a rising regional power which is playing an increasing role in the affairs of the Middle East. It could be one of the bridges linking the region with Europe and the Islamic Asiatic republics. Hence, relations with it are worth developing. Improving these relations is the right course of action, despite the unfortunate timing of Turkey's strategic alliance with Israel which has harmed Arab interests."
(Makram Mohamed Ahmed, 16 May)

Al-Gomhuria: "No Arab wishes to see Arab-Turkish relations deteriorate. These ties are historic *and bound by geographical considerations which* foster good neighbourliness. But the recent military agreement between Turkey and Israel and the joint manoeuvres with the US have generated worry and anger. We are not looking for a conspiracy behind every action, but the rapid pace of cooperation among the three nations and joint military manoeuvres *raise important questions concerning* Arab national security and Turkey's present and future role."
(Kamel Zuheiry, 16 May)

Akhbar El-Yom: "The history of suspect pacts in the region is long and bloody. Egypt's position on them has always been steadfast. National governments before and after the revolution have always rejected them. Today, the USSR has collapsed and the alleged communist threat has ended, but pacts go on. And if some Arab states are displeased, this does not matter, according to a State Department spokesman. The Arabs have always been the target. Their territories, oil, wealth and water are coveted by others. The conspiracy will go on until Arab anger translates into something concrete. The conspiracy will go on. The US will go on telling us that Israel wants peace — and Turkey as well!
(Galal Aref, 17 May)

Al-Ahram: "Relations between Turkey and Israel have developed so rapidly over the past few months as to draw attention. Officials, particularly military personnel, of both countries have been exchanging visits at an unprecedented rate. It is clear that the US and Israel have been encouraging Turkey and its military to steer a course inimical to neighbouring *countries, particularly Syria, Iraq and Iran. Turkey* was led to understand that the Arabs' present position is weak and that they are incapable of taking any responsive or effective joint action."
(Taha El-Magdoub, 18 May)

Al-Wafd: "The present military cooperation between Turkey and Israel *has gained* a strange momentum. The Arabs have turned into spectators, preoccupied with their own differences. Will the Arabs wake up in time or fall prey to the Israeli octopus, the octopus that has gone into alliance with other powers in the region? Israel is the Great Satan which is biding its time until it could impose its hegemony on everyone."
(Sanaa El-Said, 18 May)

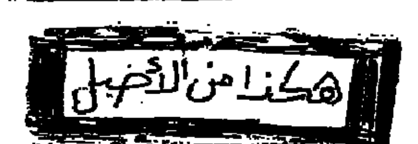
October: "The real objective of the joint Turkish-Israeli military manoeuvres is to threaten Syria. The participation of the US in these manoeuvres suggests that it supports Israel's hostile policies towards Syria. The strange thing is that the Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman announced recently that these manoeuvres were not strategic and not aimed at any state in particular ... Are we supposed to believe this? Are we really supposed to believe that the Turkish-Israeli manoeuvres with the participation of the US Sixth Fleet *is* a humane exercise?"
(Editorial, 18 May)

Al-Araby: "It is hard to understand why Tel Aviv spies on Washington as in the recent Mega case. Israel usually gets what it wants from US satellites. Could this be an *isolated* case or is there something in the Zionist mentality that requires it to spy on its benefactors. Or is there a plot to mislead the Arabs into believing that there is a problem between the US and Israel, the aim being to divert their attention while the US delivers them to Netanyahu on a plate emblazoned with the Star of David?"
(Emadeddin Hussein, 19 May)

Compiled by ***Hala Saqr***



No single line circumscribes the portrait of renowned director Youssef Chahine, whose name is on everyone's lips this week, thanks to the lifetime achievement award he received at the 50th Cannes Film Festival. Instead, I drew a series of lines, contrasting yet interconnected. His smile, surprisingly, does not detract from the essentially dramatic quality of his features. The lines of his forehead contradict the contours of his rounded cheeks. His smile, in turn, is almost masked by the triangular nose which divides his face in two. The eye is then drawn upwards by the strong lines of his chin, clean-cut as opposed to the wavy shock of silver hair. The multiple lines combine to form a portrait in constant, rapid motion — very similar to his films.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Chip off the old block

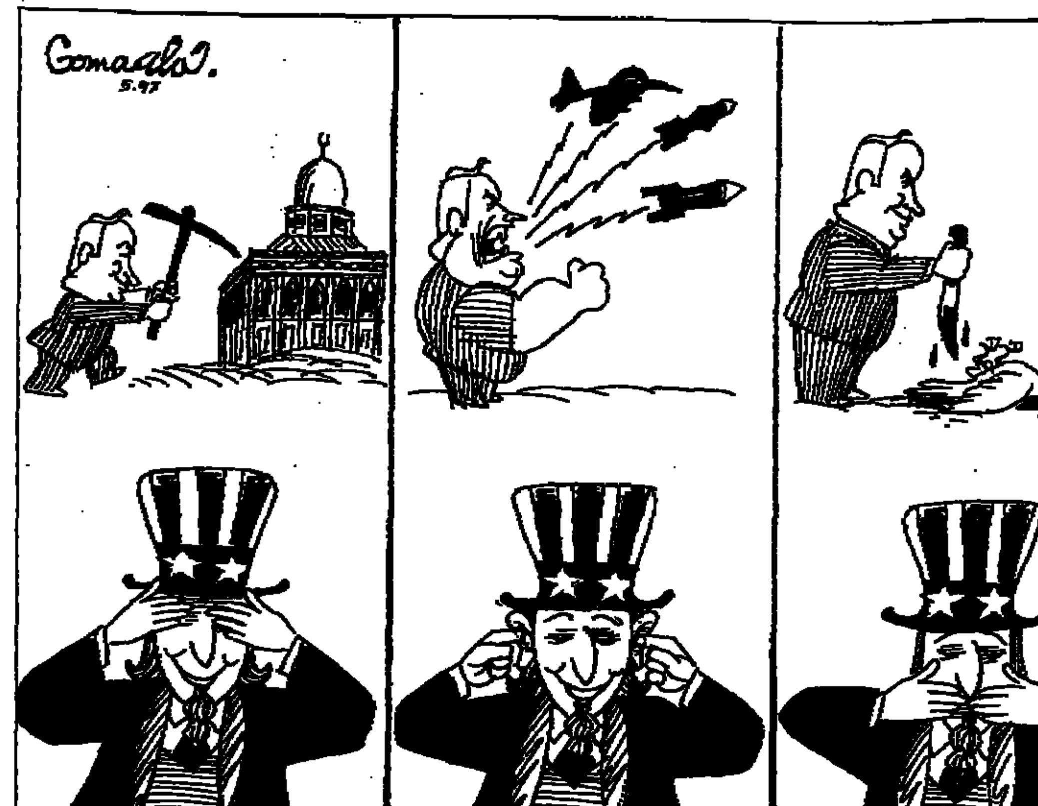
Not many people in Egypt took much notice a few days ago, when it was announced that "Deep Blue" had defeated the world champion, Gary Kasparov, in a chess match. Yet this piece of news shocked many people all over the world. How could a man-made computer surpass a man in intelligence and strategy?

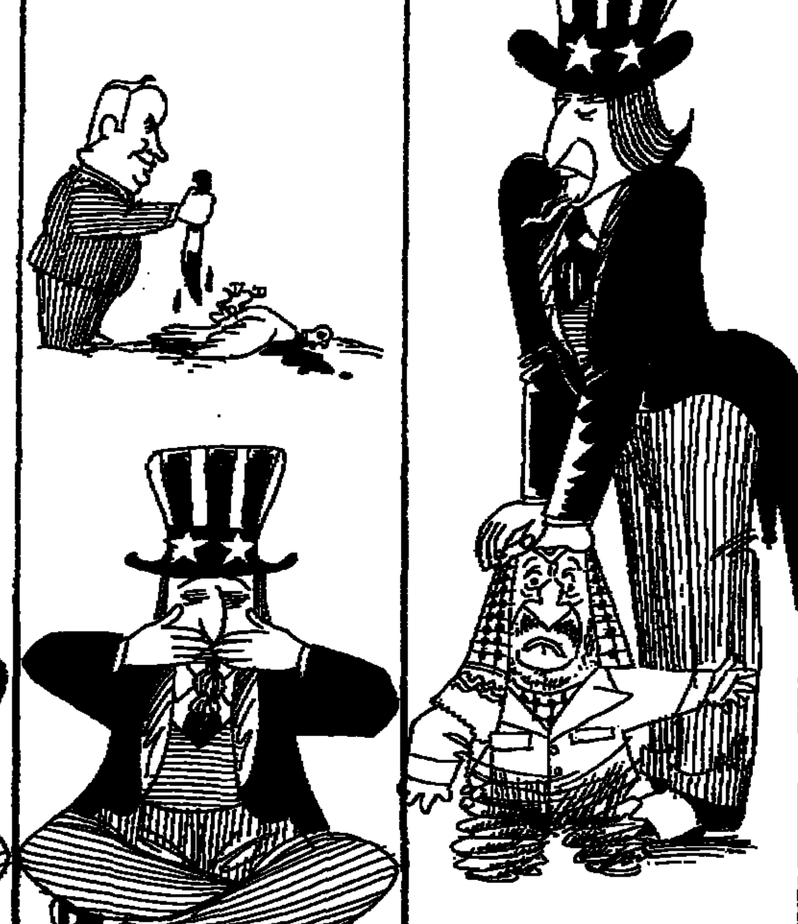
There were some who refused to accept this, finding Kasparov's defeat insufficient proof of the computer's superiority, and arguing that chess is not a yardstick for intelligence. The computer may master a game better *than* the human being, but it has neither human genius nor even intelligence. It is merely an accumulation of human knowledge, while humans will always be more than the sum total of the *knowledge* stored in a computer, no matter how advanced the machine or how great its capacity. The computer cannot write novels or compose songs, invent poetry, love or hate. It *feels neither joy nor* sorrow, nor can it elaborate a world-view or a philosophy of life. It cannot absorb or learn from its own experiences, nor those of others.

When Kasparov was *beaten by Deep Blue*, however, he found its intelligence superior to that of most people, and suggested that time was no longer on the side of human beings in the race against the computer.

Computer technology has invaded nearly every domain of life. It is rapidly — inevitably — entering all aspects of our work and leisure. In Egypt, and in Third World countries in general, we have not *yet fully felt the im*pact of these developments. In most advanced nations the computer has become a necessity for managing any occupation or business, large or small: banks, factories, shops *and* government administration are all run through computers; they have become indispensable in universities, research centres, schools, and even many homes. One reason for the high level *of* unemployment in industrialised nations is the redundancy of workers untrained in computer technology or unable to adapt.

What is most disturbing in Egypt's case is the great disparity between the state's efforts to encourage the use of computer technology and make people as conversant as *possible* with the machines, and computer-related policies in other countries. The rumours regarding the introduction of computers in schools, announced as an incipient event, are just that — *rumours* and wishful thinking. Even more disturbing are the Byzantine discussions *concerning* subjects that have no relevance to real life. At any rate, a computer, if it were to join in the conversation, would no doubt be accused of apostasy.





Soapbox

Getting together

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are relative newcomers to the Arab world. But these organisations can play a crucial social role, especially given the changes caused by current *structural adjustment programmes* and the realisation that governments may be unable to fulfil many of their traditional functions. This is where NGOs come in. Their role is not to replace the state, but to assist with some of the tasks previously ascribed to government bodies.

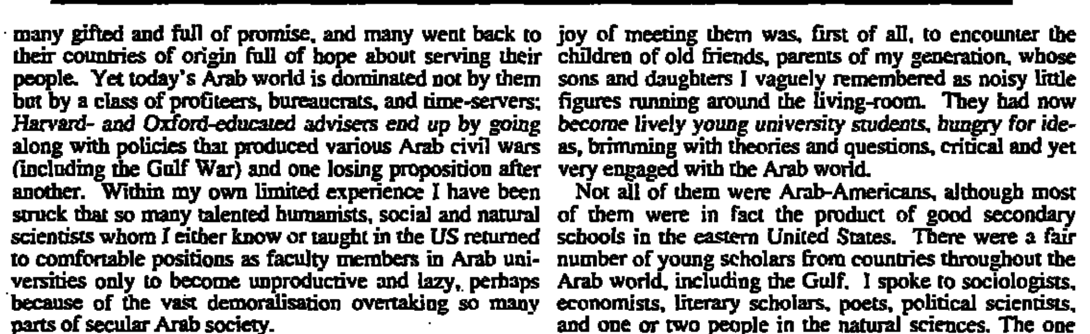
NGOs in the Arab region must coordinate their efforts and develop common projects such as a unified code of ethics. Coordination is crucial, since it will allow us to *avoid duplicating work or setting conflicting goals. One* way of bringing NGOs together is increased communication among Arab countries, especially since the role of NGOs looks set to increase further. NGOs encompass a wide spectrum of functions, whether cultural or development-related. In many cases, efforts in these fields take the form of charity or assistance to the poorest segments of society. Yet I anticipate that, with more communication, NGOs can take on a more active role in development: eradicating illiteracy, income-generating activities, etc. An active role would be more productive than simply providing *for the poor without generating self-*reliance. This should also be addressed when Arab NGOs unite and coordinate their efforts.



This week's soapbox speaker is professor of sociology at the American University in Cairo.

Madiha El-Safti

The next generation?



Will the new generation of young Arabs and Westerners avoid the clichés, the fear, disappointment *and subservience* that plagued their elders? **Edward Said** hopes so

It is hard for any Arab aged between 50 and 70 not to feel that his or her generation has not made an all-round mess of things. Ours was the generation that supported and lived through the first decade of post-World War Two independence which brought to power the very regimes — surprisingly durable — that run things today: the armies, the undemocratic societies, the intelligence services, the hopelessly backward and unreformed educational system, the growing gap between a small elite and a vast number of disadvantaged citizens, the dependence on the United States, the almost total absence of a thriving civil society, the sinking rate of nearly all forms of productivity. Ours is also the generation that announced all sorts of wonderful slogans about liberation, creating a new society, and freedom from the shackles of a colonial *past. The dream was to be Arab unity, a phrase that has* become almost a term of abuse, replaced instead by all kinds of fancy formulations about a new Middle East that was supposed to get us out of the traps of that illusory hope of unity. Worse yet, the ideal of cooperation and planning has withered into a string of jealous nationalisms that have now reached the end of their promise. And to top it all off, we all live under Israeli hegemony. The longest military occupation in the 20th century continues its unabated rule; a set of flawed, deeply unpopular peace agreements with an Israel that has neither bothered to define its borders nor to modify its racist anti-Arab laws, were the lamentable result of a failure of Arab military, political and social policy. Israel got its way in most things, with the result that today "peace" is only a word shunned by most Arabs as a trap, celebrated by only a small minority of their number as a hope, and essentially rejected by the most reactionary and brutal government in Israel's history.

This is not a record to be proud of, obviously enough, nor is it something in its present form that we can confidently hand down to our children. And it certainly is not a matter of becoming more, or less (as various Islamic movements have argued) Western. Most of the advis*ers to Arab leaders today are Western-trained and educat*ed. A fair number of Arab university and college professors were trained in American and European universities. Many of them were contemporaries of mine, many gifted and full of promise, and many went back to their countries of origin full of hope about serving their people. Yet today's Arab world is dominated not by them but by a class of profiteers, bureaucrats, and time-servers; *Harvard- and Oxford-educated advisers end up by going* along with policies that produced various Arab civil wars (including the Gulf War) and one losing proposition after another. Within my own limited experience I have been struck that so many talented humanists, social and natural scientists whom *I* either know or taught in the *US* returned to comfortable positions as faculty members in Arab universities only to become unproductive and lazy, perhaps because of the vast demoralisation overtaking so many parts of secular Arab society.

There is some small consolation that our generation is inevitably reaching the end of its tenure without, alas, having very much to hand on to our children. But there are grounds for hope, hope in unexpected places. Three weeks ago I gave a lecture on the relationship between imagination and imperialism at a distinguished university near Boston. It was the first lecture I had given after four months of illness and confinement at home, so I was quite apprehensive about how it would be received, and about how I would be able to deliver it. The lecture went reasonably well, there was a spirited question and discussion period after it, and then we were all invited to a reception next door. The discussion continued for quite a time afterwards, most if not all of it sustained by a sizable group *of young Arab men and women, students at places like* Harvard, MIT, Tufts, and Boston University. All of them seemed to be between the ages of 20 and 30, with a preponderance of younger people in that range. Part of the joy of meeting them was, first of all, to encounter the children of old friends, parents of my generation, whose sons and daughters I vaguely remembered as noisy little figures running around the living-room. They had now *become lively young university students, hungry for ide*as, brimming with theories and questions, critical and yet very engaged with the Arab world.

Not all of them were Arab-Americans, although most of them were in fact the product of good secondary schools in the eastern United States. There were a fair number of young scholars from countries throughout the Arab world, including the Gulf. I spoke to sociologists, economists, literary scholars, poets, political scientists, and one or two people in the natural sciences. The one thing that impressed me about every one of them was the almost total absence in what they said of the clichés and vague formulas that were the stock in trade of my generation. None of them seemed to have any system of answers to our problems: rather they were full of questions about why we were that way, and full also of a kind of healthy scepticism about easy answers or solutions. None of them seemed disengaged from the Arab world, even those who were born or brought up in the West. But their connection was unsentimental, although very real. All of them were essentially bilingual, fluent and at home both in English and Arabic, which the Americans among them had learned the way my son learned the language, on their own, the hard way; and *there was a mastery of both Arab and Western discourse* that suggested an ease unavailable to my generation, which I have always thought got the worst of both worlds, mostly resentful and hostile about a West that had seemed to reject them, sentimental about an Arab world that an unhappy expatriation had painted in falsely rosy colours.

It is important to mention that the whole group of about forty young people, graduates and undergraduates, seemed to be in the care of Professor Elaine Hagopian, a marvelously kind and generous teacher of sociology at Simmons College in Boston. She is certainly the most dedicated and modest person I know; she never boasts or talks about herself, she is always concerned about others, and most commendable of all, she has made it her personable responsibility to care for these young Arabs in Boston, all of whom regard her not only as a senior professor but as an older sister. She is completely egalitarian, and so, as one of them told me, she never makes *them feel inferior or somehow less important* a person than she. What she does, she does without money and without official support. No wonder then that all the young people I met, all intelligent, all articulate and eager for some work to do to help our Arab world, seemed so indebted to her. In my generation it was — and still is — the case that the older and more significant you feel yourself to be, the more you bully the young, prevent their rise, are jealous of their success, repress enthusiasm and initiative whenever possible. Professor Hagopian is the exact opposite, a genuine mentor.

For the first time in years, I felt my gloom about our condition lifting. Here was a new generation that had suddenly emerged (there must be many like them throughout the Arab world and elsewhere) despite the miserable failures of the past and present. In my opinion, one of the great things about this generation is its ability to exist comfortably in more than one world; gone is the paranoid defensiveness of the past when a blanket of hatred of the West coexisted with both fear and *ignorance* of it, along with a secret subservience to its every dictate. I felt it was my duty to announce to our disheartened people that a new generation of fine young people was present, and needed careful support and nurturing. Can *we follow Elaine Hagopian's example, or are we going to* follow the example of our generation? Yes, it is a new generation, but we bear responsibility for its ascendancy. I hope we can do the right thing.

Installing a new apartheid

Israel has no intention of ever implementing the Oslo Accords, writes **Azmi Bishara**. It will merely continue to demonstrate the uses of overwhelming force. Meanwhile, the Palestinian elites obtain privileges for their role in pushing through the US's final solution

Whenever Israeli-Palestinian negotiations reach a stalemate, a recurrent pattern of crisis management can be discerned:

The Palestinian Authority (PA) postpones negotiations while maintaining the minimum level of security coordination stipulated by the signed agreements, which overlapping methods of security organisation imposes.

On the other hand, the Israelis stick to their position, which led to the crisis in the first place: the expansion of settlements in Jerusalem, imposition of their concept of the final status, rejection of their commitment to the signed agreement, a unilateral interpretation of the agree*ments. They focus exclusively on their own* power and the ability to impose their will. All the crises fabricated or provoked by Israel are different ways of expressing the same pitfalls of the Oslo Accord. Their purpose is to demonstrate the ability of one side to use its overwhelming power in order to impose its *terms and conditions*. The Palestinians have no option other than boycotting the negotiations, or crying out for help.

Meanwhile, the US asks both parties to show some flexibility, then hesitates before despatching an envoy to the region under the pretext of having lost patience with "both parties' obduracy". Finally, the envoy arrives. Perplexed, the Palestinian side finds itself repeatedly subjected to the envoy's insistent attempts at persuasion, and *assertions that* it is useless to wait. The Palestinians must accept the Israeli stance. The American envoy seems to have been sent by Israel.

The Palestinian Authority proceeds to seek the support of the Arab, Islamic, and European countries. Each time, international solidarity has increased, but, following Oslo, many countries refrained from expressing any solidarity with the Palestinians, under the pretext that the present stage is one of negotiations, not struggle. The PA soon discovers that it cannot use international support as a lever in the negotiations since the United States is the main broker, and any recourse to solidarity can only be of use in a confrontation. At the present time, the PA cannot engage in any confrontation with Israel, on one hand, or with the Palestinian community, on the other.

Both the Palestinian *community and the* Constitutional Council are marginalised. Palestinians are suffering under economic strangulation, degrading standards of living, constraints on their freedom of movement, violations of their human rights, and a desperate legal situation. Therefore, the Palestinian *community* is *not* eager for confrontation. The Palestinian people refuse to be used as a tool *for* the Palestinian elite to improve its position and acquire what they perceive as new privileges in the negotiations. Apart from last September's spontaneous con*frontation, neutralised* by the PA *with remarkable suc*cess, the PA's confrontations over boundary lines have seemed fictitious, and are regarded by the Israelis only as violations of the PA's commitment to security. On every occasion, Israel and the US reiterate that the basic issue is the PA's commitment to Israel's security.

The Israeli opposition parties accuse the government of causing Israel's international isolation, and claim that they are capable of implementing the same measures without arousing the *same repercussions*. They also claim they are able to establish a satisfactory understanding with the Palestinian elites. But the opposition has not made its move. It is either waiting for an invitation to participate in a national coalition government, or still biding its time, now that the possibility of such participation has been eliminated, until Palestinian concessions are made. In the past, the Israeli opposition warned that the government was drawing the country into a violent confrontation, but that did not occur. Then a shift occurred when the Israeli government itself adopted a belligerent stance, once by bringing out the tanks, and at other times by contemptuous, rude threats made by ministers and army commanders — one example is the extreme arrogance displayed in an interview published on 9 May in *Yediot Aharonot*.

Some members of the PA have suggested abandoning the Palestinian demand that Israel cease its activities, while Israel has concentrated on matters more closely connected with privileges for the Palestinian elites than with the *negotiation issues*. Thus the ball *is, once again,* in the Palestinian court.

This time, new variables have come into play, which the Palestinian and Arab leaders should at least heed, if they do not intend to deal with them. Netanyahu, who *these days is having his picture taken repeatedly in mil*itary uniform, is much more vulnerable than his appearance indicates. In addition to his loss of credibility locally and internationally after the Bar-On scandal, he is caught between the extreme right and the spiritual mentors of the Likud-led factions because he has now lost the national unity option. This indicates that he is engaged, locally and internationally, in an isolated battle against the Palestinians. In this effort, he is allied with various more or less obscure forces, as well as fundamentalists both in the US and Israel. Meanwhile, the Israeli opposition is now able to move more freely in the absence of the national unity government option. Two options are left open, however: the possibility of bringing pressure to bear on Netanyahu's *government; and the* transfer of the crisis to Israel.

The second variable concerns the Likud Party's definitive decision to forego the principal concepts of the Oslo peace accords, on which Rabin, not the Palestinian side, had insisted. The Likud's objective is the total separation of the interim solution from the final settlement. The present Israeli government has no intention of fulfilling its remaining commitments as stipulated in the Oslo Accord, unless the PA accepts, with certain mod*ifications naturally*, the Israeli concept *of the final settle*ment.

Palestinian acceptance of the settlements built in Jerusalem falls under the category labelled "mutual concessions" by the Israelis. Israel considers the settlement *in Jebel Abu Ghneim as the application of its absolute* right to build settlements in Jerusalem, not an incidental act that needs to be condoned. The Likud refuses to fulfil its Oslo commitments, so that when negotiations concerning the final settlement resume, the *points agreed upon in Oslo may be put on the table* once more.

In the meantime, while Israel has made the national unity option impossible by insisting on the settlements and applying the Bantustan model in its dealings with the PA, indirectly the PA has been assisting it by undermining the bases of Palestinian civil society, and by promoting the emergence of an elite group to link Israeli-Palestinian relations through a system of privileges and commissions. *A new apartheid* regime is taking root in Palestine. Irrespective of the pacifying solutions proposed by the United States, which will be approved by the Palestinian elite as an honourable way out of the crisis, apartheid will necessarily give rise to new patterns of thought, hitherto unknown to the country.

The writer is an Arab member of the Israeli Knesset.

To The Editor

Song sung true

Sir - David Blake in his review of the *Marriage of Figaro* production in Arabic describes our language as "...rather on a shelf and non-active in the Opera House". Perhaps it is difficult for him to appreciate the nuances and power of this great singing language since he is a non-native *speaker*. But he is touching on an important point here: there is a pervasive elitism about allowing opera to be performed in our language. We defend our work by simply saying that we are trying to form a genuine national opera company out of the new generation of Egyptian singers. As with London's English National Opera, we are using our native language. It is a difficult task and one we will be striving to *improve as we gain* more experience. Breaking new ground is always difficult but we are confident that, if left to do our work, we will develop as singing actors and be able to serve well in the arena of opera in Cairo in the future.

Raouf George Zaidan
Cairo Opera House baritone

Goethe grief

Sir - Needing a course in German, I went to the Goethe Institute to inquire, and was told by the secretary that I needed to sit for an exam to *determine* which level I would enter. I was told to come on 12 May and that the door would open at 8.30, but to come early (around 8.00) so that I could get an early number and not wait too long.

I went on the correct day and arrived 8.10am, expecting to find different queues and to join my queue to get a number. When I got there I found a hundred or more students of both sexes and all ages crowding around the large metal gate, behind which one of the security guards was standing, waiting to *let us in* at 8.30. I wondered why I had been asked to come early and how this man would organise us into our separate groups when the gate opened.

At 8.30, another man appeared behind the gate, made sure the gate was properly locked (!), and informed us in a loud voice that he would start distributing the red cards for us to determine our level. Then he stuck his arm through the gate with the red cards as if he was a keeper in a zoo holding peanuts out to a group of hungry monkeys.

Of course, complete *chaos ensued*, because many of those needing red numbers were at the back, trying to get to the gate, and many of those at the gate were trying to make way for the others. *Those* who managed to get a number were squashed by the others.

I wondered: Is this German discipline? Or do the Germans think that Egyptians have no pride and can be treated this way? I myself was pushed and pulled by the multitudes, and found myself holding a red card with a number on it, which I immediately tore into *pieces. When I could get myself dis*entangled, I took the first taxi home. I only wish I had had a video camera with me. I had taken a day off from work to see myself and my compatriots being insulted.

Dr Reine Naggar
El-Salam Hospital
Mohandessin

Al-Ahram Weekly

22 - 28 May 1997

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Selim (Oil on Paper)
Akhenaten Gallery, 4a & 4b, Centre of Arts, El-Maahad El-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 22 May.
Works collected together under the titles "On Music and Musicians", "On Body and Nudes" and "On Signs and Symbols".

Pino Pandolfini (Mixed Media)
Centre of Arts, El-Maahad El-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 22 May.
Recent works exploring Gods and Heroes of the Mediterranean.

Romano Della Chiesa (Paintings)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily 11am-8pm. Until 22 May.

Elfi Fröhlich (Photographs)
Museum of Modern Egyptian Art, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 24 May.

Zakaria El-Khanany (Glassworks), **Kamel Ghandar** (Watercolours) and **Mohamed Oraby** (Paintings)
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 4.30pm-9pm. Until 25 May.

Paul Rinaldi (Drawings, Paintings & Photographs) and **Julie Caosh** (Paintings)
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 29 May.

Ursula Brosch (Drawings and Paintings)
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louk. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12pm-8pm. Until 29 May.

Hazem El-Mestikawy
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 2pm-9pm. Until 29 May.

Hedayet El-Mallawany (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 31 May.

Al-Ahram Artists Collective Exhibition
Al-Ahram Bldg, Main Hall, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786100/400. Daily 9am-10pm. Until the end of the month.
Works by Makram Henein, Nagwa El-Ashri, Nagui Kamel and Mohamed El-Nasser.

Group Show
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 4 June.

Munir El-Shaarani (Calligraphy)
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746. Until 5 June.

Around The World
French Cultural Centre, Mounira annex, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-2pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 5 June.
Seventeen French photographers exhibit 17 impressions of 17 countries.

John Feeney
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 5 June.
Architectural photographs.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khalils and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared. There are also a number of excellent orientalist works.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.
The world's largest collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures, including massive granite statues and the smallest household objects used by the Ancient Egyptians, along with, of course, the controversial mummies room. A perennial must.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses a distinguished collection of Coptic art and artefacts, including textiles, manuscripts, icons and architectural features in a purpose built structure in the heart of the Coptic city.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork, coins and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke periods and from other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egypt Awakening became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

French Film Week
French Cultural Centre, Mounira annex, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679.
25 May, 7pm: Fanfan, dir. Alexandre Jardin, 1993
26 May, 7pm: Elles n'oublient jamais, dir. Christopher Frank, 1993
27 May, 7pm: Le huitième jour, dir. Jaco Van Dormael, 1996
28 May, 7pm: Le nouveau monde, dir Alain Corneau, 1994

The Passage to Japan
Japanese Cultural Centre, Japanese Embassy, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. 15 May, 6pm.
Directed by Shinichiro Sawai.

La Ley de la Frontera
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Adly St, Kodak passage, Downtown. Tel 395 2326. 28 May, 7.30pm.
Directed by Adolfo Aristarain.

German Films
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877.
22 May, 7pm: Die Wildente, dir Hans Geissendorfer, 1978.
27 May, 7pm: Das Zweite Erwachen der Christa Klages, Margarethe van Trotta, Luisa Francia, 1977.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

The Mirror has Two Faces
Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Multiplex

The Juror
Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Jerry Maguire
New Odeon I, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Phenomenon
New Odeon II, as above. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Maximum Risk
Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Last Dance
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Jack
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm.

The Empire Strikes Back
New Odeon III, as above. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Return of the Jedi
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Michael Collins
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

The Phantom
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

The Chamber
Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm.

Emra'a Wa Khamas Regal (A Woman and Five Men)
Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Bekhit Wa Adila II (Bekhit and Adila II)
Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Samaka Wa Arba' Qoroush (A Fish and Four Sharks)
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Emra'a Wa Khamas Regal (A Woman and Five Men)
Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

MUSIC

Olga Kouznetzova
Gomhouria Theatre, Gomhouria Street, Downtown. Tel: 390 7707 24 May, 9pm.
Tchaikovsky's 2nd Piano Concerto

Song Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 23 May, 9pm.
With Cairo Opera Troupe

Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 25 May, 9pm.
With pianist Mustafa Gharam

Oboe and harp recital
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 26 May, 9pm.
With Mohamed Saleh and Manal Mohieddin

National Arab Music Ensemble and Children's Choir
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 22 May, 9pm.
A concert in memory of Mohamed El-Mogi

Cairo Choral Society
All Saints' Cathedral, Zamalek, 22 May, 8pm.
Larry P Catlin directs the Cairo Choral Society, soloists and orchestra, in performances of Mozart's Solemn Vespers and Schubert's Mass in G Major.

DANCE

Multiplex
Gomhouria Theatre, Gomhouria Street, Downtown. Tel: 390 7707 23, 25 & 26 May, 9pm.
The Swiss dance theatre troupe Nomades perform a triple programme comprising D'eux, Bidon donc and Euskara

THEATRE

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Madinet Nasr. Tel 402 0804. Daily 8.30pm, Thur 10pm.

Balouza Fil Ballon (Balouza at the Balloon)
Balloon Theatre, Corniche El-Nil, Agouza. Tel 347 1718. Daily 9pm.

Messa' El-Kheir Ya Masr (Good Evening Egypt)
Mohamed Farid Theatre, Emadeddin St. Tel 770 603. Daily 9pm.

Tuqous Al-Isharat Wal-Tahawulat (The Rites of Signs and Changes)
National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267. Daily 9pm.

El-Mar'a Allati Tokallem Nafseha Kathiran (The Woman Who Speaks To Herself Too Much)
Zaki Tolaimat Hall, El-Tali'a Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 937 948. Daily 9pm.

El-Mahzala (The Disgrace)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily 9pm.

LECTURES

Individual and Society in the Muslim Mediterranean World
Blue Room, Social Science Building, Greek Campus, AUC. 24 May
11 am: The Currency Crisis and Economic Decline, Ghislaine Alleaume; *The Jiflik: Between Individualisation and Militarisation*, Mohamed Hakim;
2.30 pm: Economic Liberalisation and Political Deliberalisation: Egypt in the 1990s, Eberhart Kienle; *The Worst of Times: Crisis Management in al-Shidda al-'Uzma*, Amina Elbendary; *Modern Egyptian History — Beyond Enigmas*, Peter Gran

Identity, between nation and ethnicity, the case of the Caucasus
CEDEJ, 14 Gam'eyet El-Nisr St, Mohandessin. Tel 361 1932. 20 May, 5pm.
Lecture in Arabic by Seteney Shami of the Population Council.

Germany's Post-Unification Foreign Policy
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref (Bustan) St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877. 21 May, 7pm.
Lecture by Gerhard Thiedemann, cultural attaché at the German Embassy. The lecture will be followed by the German film *Politics for Peace* (in German).

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064.
Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries

GLASSWORKS by **Zakaria El-Khanani** and watercolours by **Mohamed Urabi** and **Kamal Ghandar** are displayed together at **Khan Al-Maghrabi** under the collective title "A Touch of Light". El-Khanani's glassworks are technically accomplished and emphasise the possibilities for texture inherent in the medium. Urabi's crowded watercolours emphasise, with their compositional complexities, the two dimensionality of the picture plane, while Ghandar's work depend for their effects on his daring brush strokes and vibrant palette.

Aida Ayyoub shows recent works at the Centre for Arts, Zamalek — still-lifes set in lunar landscapes. **Ahmed Fouad Selim** also exhibits at the Centre — accomplished studies, with a residual figuration, of music and musicians — as well as **Youssri Mohamed**, who shows both paintings and abstract sculptures.



Ahmed Fouad Selim

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

Sa'dallah Wannus' death, after a brave fight with cancer, deprives the Arab world of its leading playwright. His

Staring death in the eye

An event in the history of modern Arab literature is how **Mona Anis** describes the late writings, intimately concerned with his own mortality, of Sa'dallah Wannus

When Wannus was told, three years ago, that he had only a few months to live he decided to stage a fight, to stare the greatest question of existence, death, in the face and continue writing till the last moment. Besides six plays written between 1994 and 1997, he also produced a number of texts on death collected in the 175-page book *On Memory and Death*, from which the text translated opposite comes. It also contains an 80-page text, "A Journey in the Wilderness of a Passing Death", the appearance of which constitutes an event in the history of modern Arab literature. Written in August 1996, immediately after Wannus had been discharged from hospital, it concludes thus:

"Job had his God to argue with. But for me, with whom shall I argue when all I have is a simple and barren certainty: from darkness I came and to darkness I return."

Here is the realisation that at the end of the journey there is, properly speaking, nothing but the end. And disturbing as this might be, it is generous of Wannus, able to give artistic form to his thoughts right to the very end, to share them with such ingenuousness.

Perhaps the fight he waged against death stems from the belief that violence, evil and death intrude into the world and must be struggled against by critical means, both political and aesthetic.

Whether this continuation to the very end was a wish on Wannus's part to survive death through art, or whether he used his final artistic works as a vehicle to understand better the wounds and failures of his life, in a way that only aesthetics can make available, the result is a number of works rare in the veracity of their self-questioning, and the questioning of all prevailing wisdoms in the Arab world pertaining to morality, politics and sexuality.

Those who are familiar with Wannus' late plays — one is now being staged at the National Theatre — will, perhaps, be better able to understand what Theodor Adorno meant when, commenting on Beethoven's late style, he wrote:

"The maturity of the late works of significant artists does not resemble the kind one finds in fruit. They are, for the most part, not round, but furrowed, even ravaged. Devoid of sweetness, bitter and spiny they do not surrender themselves to mere delectation...they show more traces of history than of growth."

Sa'dallah Wannus' complete works, which appeared last year in Damascus, begin with a dedication to his daughter, Dema (15 years old):

"Forgiveness or condemnation is no longer the point. What makes the grief of my soul greater is that you are being driven, prematurely, to plough a history and a land only to reap difficulties and frustration."

This dedication is obviously a comment on the famous words of Brecht, a seminal influence on Wannus' career, in *To Posterity*, a poem that exercised a seminal influence on a whole generation of Arab writers and intellectuals.

Other than knowing the title of the English translation of Brecht's poem, about which I consulted a friend, I do not recall knowing the poem in anything other than its many Arabic translations. All of them use high-sounding rhetorical phrases while even the title in one famous translation of the early 1960s is changed into *To Future Generations*. One wonders if Wannus' first encounter with the poem was in this translation?

The poem laments that the age in which the poet lived had made speaking of trees almost a crime since it implied not speaking of horrors. The poem ends with a request for future generations, who come in better times, *not to curse those* who could not talk of trees, and whose features were distorted by constant frowning, but to remember them and forgive the limitations imposed by their difficult times.

What happened in the 30 years separating the early Wannus, ardent follower of Brecht, from the late Wannus, concerned with neither the forgiveness nor condemnation of future generations, but pained for leaving behind a land unprepared and the knowledge that working this land will only yield frustration, are the transformations undergone by a committed intellectual whose dreams had failed. A noble and brave intellectual though, who despite conceding the defeat of dreams did not regret the journey.

Sa'dallah Wannus, playwright; culture editor of Al-Safir *daily, Beirut, 1982; editor of the cultural periodical* Qadaiya wa Shahadat *(Issues and Testimonies), 1990-1992. Produced 22 plays, 3 books and numerous translations, political and literary articles. Born 1941 in Housin Al-Bahr, a coastal village near Tartous, Syria; died May 15, 1997, in Damascus, buried the following day in his native village.*

Beyond the pale

Nehad Selaiha charts the dramatic career of Sa'dallah Wannus

Of his generation, Syrian playwright Sa'dallah Wannus (1941-1997) is perhaps the best known in the Arab world and the most widely read and performed. After a short piece, *Tales of the Statue-Chorus*, written in 1965, he made his real debut with a savage political satire on the Arab regimes that caused the 1967 defeat. *The 5th of June Party*, written in '67 in the aftermath of the so-called 'setback' and performed in '68, took Arab theatrical circles by storm and proved an instant hit. It vividly dramatised, in a highly theatrical form that relied on the interaction of stage and auditorium and invited the active participation of the viewer, the traumatic sense of disillusionment and betrayal experienced by all Arabs in those days. It opens with a group of actors preparing to stage a play that dramatises the official media version of what happened in the war, with an officious stage-manager presiding over the proceedings, and ends with a mock audience taking over the stage to tell the real story in a series of scenes that mix acting with commentary and narration. It was a daring theatrical experiment, not only politically (Wannus was called for investigation before the military intelligence service) but artistically as well, and firmly placed Wannus among the avant-garde playwrights of that period.

Wannus's next play, *The Adventure of the Mameluke Jaber's Head*, was equally revolutionary in its content and dramaturgy and was banned on the opening night. Based on an old popular story, with vague historical origins, it is a cautionary tale against collaboration with oppressive rulers and tyrants in the hope of gaining individual salvation. When a city is besieged and the sultan is at a loss how to sneak a message out to ask for outside help, a wily and ambitious slave called Jaber comes up with an ingenious solution to the sultan's dilemma: he shaves his head completely bald, and after the message has been written on it in indelible ink he lets his hair grow back until it completely hides it and slips out of the city. When he reaches his destination, his head is shaved and the message is delivered — only the sultan who had promised his wealth and freedom had not forgotten to add at the end of the message a small postscript saying: please, when you have read the message, chop off Jaber's head. This funny story is told in a series of scenes that alternate between the sultan's palace and the city streets and contrast the sumptuous wealth of the former with the abject poverty of the latter and once more the dramaturgy here, as in *The 5th of June Party*, exploits many of the techniques of Brecht's epic theatre (widely popular in Egypt in the sixties where Wannus spent four years studying journalism at Cairo University) and merges them with some indigenous forms of popular entertainment in an attempt to forge a kind of theatrical experience that would feel 'authentically' Arab while forcefully advocating socialism. In this, Wannus was, politically and artistically, following closely in the footsteps of such Egyptian playwrights as Youssef Idris, Mahmoud Diab, and Naguib Soroor, among others.

In the same year, 1969, Wannus produced another political parable, *The Elephant, O King of All Time*, based on an Indian folktale that portrays the disastrous consequences of fear and submission. Artistically, it is a modest achievement and lacks the acrid humour and pungent irony of previous works. Four years later, in 1973, Wannus recovered his technical ebullience and *jeu d'esprit* in *An Evening with Abu Khalil El-Qabani* in which he reverted to his favourite theme: theatre. Unlike the pretentious stage-manager in *The 5th of June Party*, El-Qabani, one of the earliest pioneers of theatre in the Arab world, was a rebellious artist who defied the traditional religious hostility towards the art of representation in the sixties of the last century, had his theatre closed and company disbanded by the authorities, and had to flee Syria for Egypt where he played a seminal role in the development of the Egyptian theatre. The choice of El-Qabani and his company as a theme was no coincidence; Wannus did not make a secret of his admiration for the man or the kind of popular musical performance he had evolved, and deliberately modelled his *Evening*'s entertainment along the lines of a typical Qabani show.

The same exuberant theatricality informs Wannus's next play, *The King is the King* which marks the end of the first stage of his dramatic career and its highest point. Here, he borrows a tale from the *Arabian Nights* (as El-Qabani often did) to argue that no one is born royal, that no king or ruler is recognisable without the props and trappings of power and that the political machine is an elaborately staged masque. In the Arabian tale, a king, in the habit of wandering among his people in disguise when bored, seeks to amuse himself further by playing a practical joke on a ruined merchant who is given to consoling himself with fanciful visions of power and glory. Wannus makes him also an alcoholic with a very hazy sense of identity. Having doused his victim with wine, the king carries him senseless to his palace, decks him out in royal robes and places him on the royal bed. The beggar will be king for one day. The tale ends happily: the king has his sport and the beggar who swallowed the bait is richly rewarded. In the play, however, the joke is cruelly turned upon the king as he watches with dazed, incredulous eyes his theatrical illusion usurping his crown, queen and courtiers. The dramatic structure is beautifully symmetrical, consisting of two parallel and contrasting parts: one about the transformation of beggar into king and the other about the transformation of king into beggar. In the stage directions Wannus insists on the use of ritual, stylised movement and gesture, a symbolic setting with a spiral throne, and unnaturally voluminous costumes.



From *The Rites of Signs and Changes*

The King is the King was written in 1977 and was followed by a long period of silence which lasted 13 long years. Wannus was not singular in this: other Arab dramatists too went silent at the time, some of them forever. The world had changed around them; many illusions had been shattered, many idols had fallen, the socialist dream had collapsed, and Arab nationalism was no longer a viable cause. Wannus, as he admitted in an interview with the Syrian drama critic Mary Elias, needed time to sort out himself and his world. It was a period of deep soul-searching and self-revision, and he came out of it 'washed clean of all illusions', as he put it. The defiant spirit and fighting optimism of the first stage of his career gave way, in the second (and sadly last), to deep intellectual pessimism, bordering on nihilism.

In 1990, Wannus broke his long dramatic silence with an adaptation of Antonio Buero Vallejo's play *La Dobla Historia del Doctor Valmy*, set in the context of the Arab-Israeli struggle and renamed *Rape*. In it one detects not only a change of mood, of technique and intellectual outlook, but a broader sympathy, an aversion to brash and facile moral judgments and a new interest in individual human suffering. Here, and in all the plays that followed until his death, the dramatic conflict gains in depth and complexity and is no longer a simple and simplistic confrontation between two separate, well-defined and morally identified forces. The characters are no longer types, symbols or ideas, but real people facing real existential and moral dilemmas. This does not mean that Wannus's last, and, by critical consensus, greatest plays have left politics behind and turned to 'human' themes. Indeed, they are extremely political, but in the deepest, most comprehensive sense of the word — a sense which is best summed up in the slogan 'the personal is political'. If the earlier plays assumed that a better system of government and distribution of wealth would create a better Arab world, the later plays demand no less than a thorough revision and fundamental reevaluation of the cultural heritage of the Arabs and their way of life, including their attitudes to women, love, sex, marriage and even homosexuality, incest and marital fidelity. No wonder that in these last plays — *Historical Miniatures* (1994), *The Rites of Signs and Changes* (1994; currently on at the National), *A Day of Our Times* and *Naughty Dreams* (1995), *The Mirage Epic* and *Drunken Days* (1996) — women are given prominence while the conventions and traditions of the patriarchy are savagely anatomised. Whether the setting is historical or the present, and whether the scope is limited or panoramic, the individual is shown in confrontation with different value systems and modes of apprehending human existence while the content of experience remains shifting and relative.

Many critics have described these last plays, particularly *The Rites* and *Naughty Dreams*, as the most daring and outspoken in the history of Arab drama. And they are right. They were written in feverish succession, at a time when Wannus was daily staring death in the face and had nothing more to fear.

THE THIRD National Festival for Egyptian Cinema, inaugurated last Sunday, 18 May, is in fact more than three years old. The festival was launched in 1991 under the title The First National Festival for Feature Films. In 1995, however, its name was changed to the National Festival for Egyptian Cinema, to include documentaries and short feature films — in addition to the full length *features that had been its staple diet*.

The festival has always paid homage to figures who have made a marked contribution in either the domain of feature or documentary films. This year's honourees include actress Aqila Rateb, actor Kamal El-Shinnawi, feature film director Hussein Kamal and documentary film-maker Salah El-Tuhami.

At the opening night, *Dahaya Al-Madina* (Victims of the City, 1946) directed by the late Niyazi Mustafa, was screened. The version shown was a *copy of an old 16mm reel reworked by the Cultural* Development Fund. Another rarity due to be screened at the festival is Salah El-Tuhami's documentary, *Baath Al-Tarikh* (Resurrecting History), which follows the removal of the statue of Ramses the Second from Mit Rahina to the square that bears the pharaoh's name.

...late writings — see this page — intimately portray his battle with illness, while opposite Mona Anis and Nehad Selaiha assess a distinguished career

The memory of prophecies



By Sa'dallah Wannus

The appointment was in the afternoon. It was the 26 July during a hot Parisian summer. We entered the clinic of Dr Etcetera, myself, my wife and my — indeed noble — friend Omar Amiralai, in the St Louis hospital. Dr Etcetera is an oncologist. That day his features wore a frown and he barely looked us in the face. After a brief greeting he invited us to sit, opened the file with all the laboratory reports, blood tests and X-rays, and said quickly as if wanting to finish with a tedious task:

- Contrary to what we had expected, the liver biopsy reveals the existence of malignant cells.

I asked in a machine-like voice (I had exhausted all my strong reactions in the two months spent running round in circles between clinics in Damascus and Paris, confirming and disputing the existence of the tumour):

— Of what kind?

The doctor answered:

— The same one you had two years ago.

I said:

— And what do you recommend?

He said:

— There is nothing to be done but a long, intensive chemotherapy.

I said:

_ I am afraid I will not survive such treatment.

Coldly, he said:

— Perhaps.. . but there is no treatment except chemotherapy.

I asked:

— What are my chances?

He shook, looked me in the eyes for the first time and said:

— But your case is terminal.

— What then is the use of grinding the remaining of my energy in chemotherapy?

He murmured, attempting to drown a note of anger. He was angry right from the beginning. Later, I often wondered why he was so angry! Was he angry at his haste in excluding the possibility of the existence of hepatic metastases? Was he angry because of the laboratory report or because of my questions? Or was it the unbearable heat that annoyed him so much? Later, I often thought of phoning him and asking why was he so angry, but I fast became disgusted by the whole affair. That afternoon, though, Dr Etcetera murmured:

— I do not know why...to alleviate your pain maybe, and extend a little your days.

What followed was a hollow talk about procedures, a treatment protocol, and a report to be sent to my original physician at the American Hospital in Paris.

We walked out of the clinic relying on the silence to remain calm, walking with sober steps. Even my wife, who does not know much French and who used to exhaust me after every appointment with a doctor by asking endless questions, wanting to know details, was content with a brief reply (incurable cancer). Each of us wrapped in silence, walking down the corridors of the hospital which seemed like the paths in a well tended and beautiful cemetery. Mohamed Makhlouf, who had driven us to the hospital, was waiting in the lobby. Strangely, he looked at us and did not ask any questions. Silence was a value to be cherished and I was slipping into it as if seeking a shelter, a cocoon. We went to the lift to go down to the car park, a great hall divided like a maze, where the lined up cars looked like elegant coffins. I felt lonely, besieged. The world around me was alive and solid but it was slipping away, distancing itself indifferently... So, the story has ended, and my hands hold only sand or water. I knew I had to arrange the final scene but felt unable to concentrate, lacking the feeling of catastrophe. My state was a mixture of the insubstantive and the void.

In the car, driving through the bustling streets of Paris, one question overwhelmed me: what is to be done now?

I found myself answering: I should sink deeper and deeper into silence and solitude. I have to untie my links with life, family, friends, indeed with the whole world, in an orderly way and with as little noise or lamentation as possible. It did not occur to me then that I should resist, but at the same time I was not sure that I was desperate. I was floating on my fate without wretchedness and I smoked a cigarette greedily. At home, the heat was unbearable. Spontaneously complacent, we stuck to our charter of silence. Mohamed had left us at the doorsteps of the building wishing me to be brave. The word sounded so funny I kept repeating it to myself while I was climbing the 60 steps leading to the door of Omar's flat. What does it mean to be brave, and what use is this being brave to a man whose departure has already been decided? Why should I be brave? Why should not I have the right to break down, wail and weep, expelling all fluids. I was overtaken by an urgent desire to weep, but only two tears came after which there was nothing to expel. Perhaps this inability to cry was part of an inner emptiness, a preparation for death, or its declaration.

Fayza was preparing coffee (the smell of coffee is delicious even to a man who is going to die), while Omar was answering the incessant telephone calls. Friends knew that today was the day the results would appear. With every new call Omar was doing his best to break the news in a way that would not sound funereal. His evasions were amusing but they only confirmed that there was a funeral. He would look to me, gesturing his inquiry as to whether I wanted to speak to the caller. I would motion back "no". Despite my love for all these friends I did not want to talk to them or hear their confused stammering. A wide gap had opened up, separating the world of the living from the exile of the dying. There is nothing left to be said. Nothing left to be done but unravel the threads and write the end.

For almost a month now we have alternated between evasion and hope. When I arrived in Paris on a sunny Monday afternoon Farouk, Faiz, Hala, Hala and Youssef were waiting at the airport. Embracing, I stole a glimpse of my death in their eyes. Later I knew they were all trying to be brave and that, once they had returned to their homes, they would weep. Ever since that day, when my friends surrounded me at the airport, I realised that I had arrived at a situation I had often anticipated, one which I had frequently lived as a transient obsession. I am lonely, though it would be ungrateful to describe my state as loneliness. It would be more precise to say that I felt deserted. Yes, now that which I had always feared, which I had once imagined following my failed suicide attempt in 1979, had happened. I was lying in the room adjacent to the office of Dr Gamal Al-Attasi, waiting for him to finish with his patients. It was a room with high walls, covered with the dust of neglect. That day I felt as deserted as Joseph abandoned by his brothers, felt that the whole world, with its lights, noise and rhythms, which I no longer understood, was withdrawing, its noise fading and lights dimming. The world was distancing itself, indifferently, as if playing a game, while the deserted sank deeper in desolation, darkness and silence. This indescribable chagrin — the horror of its taste can be felt only by someone whose body is possessed by death, someone on whom an angry physician, like Dr Etcetera, has served a final notice, ending his days.

Omar was still stammering, confused with every new call. Fayza gave us the cups of coffee she had made.

The aroma of coffee has seeped deep in my chest, as if it were pumping life..! To count all the words that lose their density and become nonsensical for someone who has been sentenced to death would be a worthwhile task. How many words does a man sentenced to death need? But wasn't I the one who often thought that I wanted to live only "now", as if that now could encompass the three phases of time. Now I will shake all my senses from the numbness of custom, sharpen them till they are sensitive and piercing. Maybe then all the flavours of seeing, hearing, smelling, touch and taste will pour over me with a novelty that intoxicates. Perhaps, in that "now", the glamour of which covers hidden corruption, one might live an eternity that is unconcerned with the future, or with what happens next. Damn it. Can one deceive oneself in that way? One can only do things, experience joy or create, under the illusion of immortality.

***

The following day I woke to the sound of rain on the roof-tiles of Omar's flat. I washed my face, descended the steep staircase that leads to the living room. Fayza was in one corner of the kitchen preparing breakfast. Omar was sitting on the large sofa, Buddha-like, a pillow in his arms. I collapsed on the rugs where normally I would sit or lie. I looked out through the large windows and was surprised by the scene. There were layers and layers of black and navy blue clouds blocking the sky, almost touching the black tiled roofs. The light was grey and scant, and it was difficult to guess the time of day. Was darkness approaching, or was it a sick day that could not find the strength to dispel the darkness of the night. I thought, not too seriously, that perhaps nature was trying to show solidarity with my condition. Whatever, the weather was funereal, reminding me, however vaguely, of a winter evening long ago with scant light and extenuated shadows. A small crib, and sprigs of myrtle and the scent of poppies and a baby that weeps and does not sleep. This room is not in the mud house — it was built of stone and cement. And in this room are two women, one old, with a pleasant face, tender of feature and gesture, the second young, pretty, tense, frightened.

This morning Omar did not ask if I had slept well. Fayza did not relate one of her optimistic dreams. Our eyes hardly met; everything was slow, heavy, and the overcast weather helped us to conceal our feelings, letting us wander in our own thoughts. The houses of Paris's deuxième arrondissement were shrouded in threads of rain and mist.

After I finished my coffee and had chain smoked three cigarettes we dressed and went out to collect and stamp the various papers that comprised my medical file, scattered in various places. We had a morning appointment with my first doctor, Dr Mashaqa of the American Hospital in Paris.

He was, as usual, friendly but reserved. My own mood was less dark than ironic. Quietly, I asked:

— Do you agree with Dr Etcetera that my illness is terminal?

He said, as if grinding his words with his teeth:

— It seems...perhaps...it seems as if so.

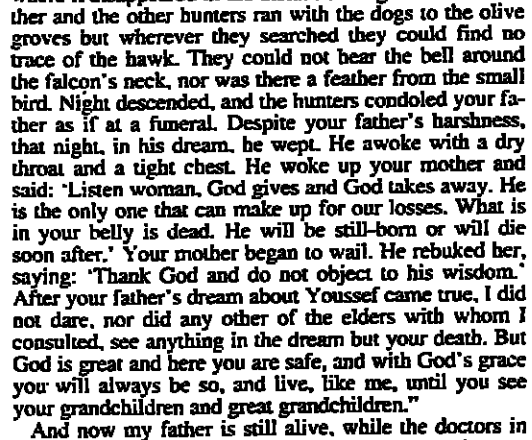
I told him:

— He is suggesting an intensive, aggressive therapy. Do you think my health permits this?

— I don't know. Perhaps you will not survive the treatment.

I said:

— Please don't blame me, Mr Mashaqa, when I say that I understand neither the logic behind what Dr Etcetera said yesterday, nor the reversal of your opinion, from saying that my illness is serious but not life threatening to saying, now, that I don't stand a chance, though you are suggesting, nonetheless, a therapy that will pollute my final days, compounding the pains of cancer with those of chemotherapy.



From *The King is the King*

He too avoided looking me in the eye, toying all the time with the objects on his desk. He paused for a moment, and a silence, like the breaking of a storm, hovered. He raised his face, which appeared warmer, looked at me and said:

— Listen. You are an exceptional patient. I haven't met many like you. You are an intellectual, and you have courage enough to face your situation as it is, without cosmetics. I cannot simply wash my hands of you without doing whatever is within my ability.

I asked:

— Is this to clear your conscience?

Wearily, he replied:

— No. This is my duty, and I care for you.

Another silence hovered. Neither Omar nor Fayza showed any inclination to interfere in the conversation, or ask any questions. I looked at him, quietly, and asked in a neutral voice..In your estimation, how much longer do I have?

He lowered his eyes, paused, and spoke quietly:

— Perhaps six months.

I said lightly:

— That's enough time. What about prescribing some strong pain killers?

Hastily, he grabbed a prescription pad, repeating sure, sure.

After handing me the prescription and accompanying us to the room of his secretary, asking her to hand over my medical file and write down a protocol for treatment, it became obvious that, like someone emerging from a depressing situation, he was heaving a sigh of relief. He shook my hand warmly, said he was happy to know me, and turned quickly on his heel to return to his office, with the light step of someone returning from the cemetery after a funeral.

As we were coming out of the hospital I lit a cigarette and began to hum a song that I used to hum whenever I was drunk.

I wasn't scared. I wasn't sad. The time for self-pity had not yet come. But that cloudy day became a sign post, as if opening an untrodden path in my memory, while I, with half-joking manner, began to recall an old prophecy that no one but I remember.

Two years ago, when my first cancer was discovered, I had ten weeks of radio-therapy in Paris. When I returned to Damascus I decided, before beginning chemotherapy, to visit my family to show them that now I was well. I travelled for a day to our village. There relatives flocked with their anxieties and tenderness. My father, who had only recently realised the nature of my illness, was over-sentimental and maudlin. My mother, who also did not know about my illness did not, when she was told, want to believe it. She was prematurely senile, which sheltered her from the shock. Of course, I told them that the French doctor had said I was completely cured; and because of this the atmosphere was as relaxed and joyful as that which follows the passing of a difficult test. My father, my cousin and sister, were gloating about the concern the state and press had shown about my illness. My father even saw in my illness something of which to be proud, an opportunity to boost the family's status.

All this was mundane, and would not have merited narration were it not that I wanted to reach the peculiar moment, that crystallised slice in the liquidity of a day overwrought with sentimentality. I do not remember the exact moment, whether it was immediately after our arrival or before leaving for Damascus. But it was a moment when I was alone with my father. I remember his quiet, perhaps even neutral, face. I remember his matter-of-fact, decisive voice. I remember listening to him, as if haunted. He said: "Your aunt's husband Rashid had the same illness as you, in his larynx. They treated him in Damascus and he was cured. Two years to the day the illness returned and killed him." He was telling the story like a fortune teller announcing a prophesy, or a scientist reporting a fact. His face showed no emotion. He did not repeat any of the customary comforting formulas that usual accompany such talk of death.

It was a peculiar moment, and I do not know what role my father was assuming. Did he think he was a prophet, or a soothsayer uttering ill-omens? Or was it simply that the old knowledge, long hidden inside him, had poured out against his will. Of course, after saying what he did, he returned back to being my over-sentimental father, surrounding me with all the love and care of which he was capable. But that moment kept returning obsessively, shaking me with bewilderment and amazement. Now, after the illness recurred two years to the date, and after two great specialists have announced that my condition brooks no hope, I can begin collecting prophecies, perchance to discover that what my father said two years ago was an intuition that had spilled from the vessel of his subconscious.

***

A small crib, and sprigs of myrtle and the scent of poppies and a baby that weeps and does not sleep. No one had thought that he would be born alive. Everybody, including the young bride, had a catastrophic conviction that the child she was bearing would be stillborn. Nobody had cared, including the bride, to prepare anything for the newcomer. And when he was born, alive, nobody believed this was anything other than a temporary state of affairs. But as the hours passed, with no sign of the approach of death, perplexity overtook everyone. The grandmother decided that anticipating the death of a baby that is full of life could well be a bad omen, one which would accompany him for the rest of his life. She also thought that her son's falcons— he was fond of hunting to the point where it had become an obsession — might not be the proper messengers for the divine will. She took matters in hand, and decided to dispel the bad omen by calling the child Saad. It was a double comfort, as her beloved husband, who died when she was still young, was also called Saad. She began to improvise or borrow whatever cloth was needed for the baby. I remember a small storm lantern lengthening the shadows but not dispelling the darkness. I remember a small crib, and sprigs of myrtle and the scent of poppies and a baby that weeps and does not sleep. There were also two women, the younger one my mother, the elder my grandmother.

Years later, and on a cold winter's night, as I lay curled in my grandmother's arms, she told me the story of my birth and the prophecy of my death (how sweet was her breath, her breathing modulated by the rhythm of speech). She said: "Your stepmother was pregnant with your brother Youssef. A short time before he was born your father saw in a dream, and you know how fond your father, may God protect him, is of hawking, he dreamed that he bought a white falcon and was excited but when he reached home and wanted to tether the hawk to its pole in front of the shop he discovered that the bird was standing on one leg, hiding the other under its wing. He examined the leg and found that it was useless. He was sad, and told himself that this did not bode well. When his wife gave birth to a beautiful white boy, he felt uneasy. A few days later, when it was discovered that the left hand of the child was paralysed, he was not surprised. He murmured: 'A messenger came to me in my dream and told me all about it.' He was waiting for his wife to give birth so that he could take a second wife, your mother. Two months later he threw a wedding feast which the villagers hereabouts will remember for many years. He wanted to show everyone his happiness, that he had finally managed to marry the girl who loved him, the girl who was engaged to her cousin but insisted she would marry no one but your father.

(Later, and after much insisting and beseeching, I would make her repeat the story of my parents marriage and the circumstances surrounding it).

Anyhow, the wedding lasted for seven days and seven nights without any hiccups to spoil the festivities. To cut a long story short, your mother was pregnant with you soon after the wedding, and as the pregnancy progressed your father dreamed, praise be upon the Prophet, that he had a black falcon the likes of which, in its speed and skill in hunting, had never been seen. He loved it more than anything, and one day, while he was hunting in the meadow, a small bird broke cover. He set the falcon after it. The bird caught its prey in its left claw and flew east, where it disappeared in the distant olive groves. Your father and the other hunters ran with the dogs to the olive groves but wherever they searched they could find no trace of the hawk. They could not hear the bell around the falcon's neck, nor was there a feather from the small bird. Night descended, and the hunters condoled your father as if at a funeral. Despite your father's harshness, that night, in his dream, he wept. He awoke with a dry throat and a tight chest. He woke up your mother and said: 'Listen woman, God gives and God takes away. He is the only one that can make up for our losses. What is in your belly is dead. He will be still-born or will die soon after.' Your mother began to wail. He rebuked her, saying: 'Thank God and do not object to his wisdom.' After your father's dream about Youssef came true, I did not dare, nor did any other of the elders with whom I consulted, see anything in the dream but your death. But God is great and here you are safe, and with God's grace you will always be so, and live, like me, until you see your grandchildren and great grandchildren."

And now my father is still alive, while the doctors in Paris have already dug my grave, and are preparing my shroud. Could it be that a passing prophecy, clothed as a summer's dream, is coming true after half a century?

***

Omar said:

— Instead of travelling tomorrow and rushing, why don't we wait for three days, and take Sunday's direct flight to Damascus? Like this, we will have time to prepare ourselves for what awaits us there.

Initially, I welcomed the suggestion, but by the second day to stay in Paris had become a nightmare. I was incapable of concentration, and felt I needed to concentrate. I was incapable of weeping, and felt I needed to weep. In fleeting moments, under the cover of silence and a lurking stickiness, I would be overcome by an incredible, an unbearable horror that would, nonetheless, pass quickly.

When we were alone Omar said, in a low voice:

— I know you have much on your mind, and I know you are making great efforts to arrange everything. I cannot blame you and I am not in a position to preach. But believe me, it is not generous, on your part, to try and spare us, and yourself, the agony of dying. What is generous would be to let us feel you have done all that you can and allow us an opportunity to share with you the oppression we all feel, and share, too, your pain. Yes Saad, real generosity is to allow us to lose you slowly, while we are showing you the love and care we feel. Don't deprive your daughter and your wife of training for your death, or of the solace that they have done everything they could for you.

The radio was always tuned into the musical station. All through that day I listened to Western classical music. As Omar was talking I could hear Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. On Saturday Adonis, Khalda, Arwad, Farouk Mardam, Faiz Mallas, Sherif Khazindar, Mohamed Makhlouf and his wife Amina came. That was an exceptional meeting, as they rarely see each other in Paris. They were all excited by the meeting, and all have a passion for talking. It was as if they wanted to bridge the chasm of time that had separated them. And my God, they were so alive. They talked about language academies, problems of translation, and Farouk's project to produce a bibliography of everything translated into Arabic from English or French. They talked about homeopathy and Orientalists, and I sat in my corner, wrapping my alienation and my distance from all the issues they discussed, all the concerns of the living, around me. They were beautiful, and they were hoping that their presence would give me warmth and strength. None of them has come out of a sense of social duty. Nevertheless, we all knew (me through my silence, they through their conversation and laughter) that a perplexing chasm separated us, and that no sympathy could bridge that chasm.

As I lost the illusion of immortality, I became vulnerable, superficial and sterile, while they who are still under the spell of that illusion are vigorously discussing, working and dreaming.

***

On Sunday morning we took our luggage to the airport together with a great number of friends who came to say good-bye as if casting their last looks on me.

In the airport tears came from my eyes. I wanted to weep, loudly, very loudly.

When the aeroplane was flying over Damascus preparing to land I felt, though in a vague way, that the worst had passed and that I held my fate in my hands.

As the plane landed, I asked Fayza slyly:

— Why did not you tell me this time *hamdellah ala asalamah*?

Choked with tears, she said;

— I was afraid you would get angry if I said it. I wish there was a way to convince you that what I feel with my heart is true (all through that month and despite all the frustrations caused by the diagnoses she kept insisting that she was not worried and that deep in her heart fear had yet to penetrate. The certainty with which she would speak about her optimism sometimes annoyed me, while other times it would incite pity.)

She continued whispering:

— I believe my heart. I am sure you will get over this. *Hamdellah ala asalamah.*

In the luggage hall I sat and lit a cigarette.. It began to be clear to me how to be generous with myself and also with my family and friends. I felt happy when walking out of the customs door I saw Dema. I have never been away from her for a whole month except in 1982, during the siege of Beirut, when she was a few weeks old. Dema was standing there with Intisar, who had come to meet us from the airport and take us home.

Walking out of the airport building the heat of August hit us in the face. Those hot summers are always cloaked with a touch of concealed catastrophe. For me, the worst of deaths is a one whose funeral proceeds to the cemetery at high noon on a hot summer's day.

At home I lay on my bed while Dema sat on the edge holding my hand. I felt that she had matured during that month and that my worries about her are exaggerated. Gently, I pushed her away, as if to prepare her for the possibility of death. Two tears came, but she was doing her best not to weep. With a lump in her throat she said:

— Dad, you are strong, please resist and stay with us if you really love us.

Wanting to ease the tension of the moment, I said:

— I need a cup of coffee.

She got up, saying:

— Do you promise?

Tenderly I answered:

— Promise.

She leaned on me, kissed me and walked out of the room, wiping her tears.

Translated by **Mona Anis** and **Nigel Ryan**

Plain Talk

Language is dynamic, always moving and developing and nothing can stop it, not even l'Academie Francaise in France or the Arabic Language Academy in Egypt. The French never stop from complaining about what they term the pollution of their language by other tongues, especially the English. We still remember Professor Etiende's book *Parlez Vous Franglais* in which he expounds on this influence.

Here in Egypt we have always had people deploring negligence in the teaching of Arabic, or attacking the use of colloquial in literary works, or denouncing colloquial poetry as non-poetry. The Arabic Language Academy has been trying in vain to introduce Arabised forms of foreign words, like telephone, radio, television and later computer. But people, whether in conversation or in writing, insist on using the original non-Arabic words.

There is, in fact, a battle going on between the purists and, for lack of another term, the progressivists. The former are crying over the spoliation of Arabic and are demanding that science and medicine at the universities should be taught in Arabic. The latter retort that foreign linguistic influences enrich Arabic and make it suitable to deal with the modern world. Furthermore, they claim, quite rightly, that teaching the sciences and medicine in Arabic would isolate our scientists and doctors from their colleagues in other countries. Since science is accumulative they will not be able to follow its development and progress.

While the French and the Egyptians feel sensitive about this so-called linguistic pollution, we find that the British have kept quiet, in spite of the fact that English is probably "more sinned against than sinning". English, as a glance through the Oxford English Dictionary would show, has hundreds of thousands of words that derive from other languages, including Arabic. English is, certainly, the most flexible and malleable of languages. Reading Joyce's *Ulysses* or *Finigan's Wake* is proof enough of this.

As I said, the British have kept quiet for a long time about this. That is, until recently, when their language was assaulted by Americanisms. It is often said that the English language has divided the British and the Americans. I have been reading a number of articles criticising this tendency, and trying to discover the source of this corruption.

Many words appear in the British press which one does not find in dictionaries. Most of these words are nouns. English is sometimes compared to a rose bush which produces a seemingly inexhaustible supply of new blooms.

In an article in the Sunday Times, Jean Aitchison gives a number of new words used by the press: cyberspace, cyberfraud, spanning, information fatigue syndrome. The writer invents herself, a new word, linguachondriacs, which refers to those "with excessive fear for the health of their language". Like the Egyptian die-hards, they lament the demise of old words and always condemn new ones. But linguistic innovation occurs not only in the use of new words, but in the increased use of prefixes like super and mini. And it is journalese which is blamed or commended for such innovations.

This is the case with Arabic. In a recent AUC Press book, *Understanding Arabic*, edited by Alaa Elgibali, Nabil M.S. Abdel Fattah writes about the socio-linguistic influence of journalism in language development in Egypt. Journalistic language, ie the kind of language published and broadcast in the print and electronic media, is a fairly recent development. It is sometimes described as a third language, located between the classical and the colloquial. Simple, yet expressive, journalese is not, according to the author, as specific and dry as scientific or literary writing. But this third language is viewed with suspicion by its opponents, who castigate it as "a source of destruction of classical Arabic."

Whatever the pros and cons might be, there is no doubt that journalese has contributed greatly to the development of language. "No professor of linguistics," writes one commentator, "has as much influence on language as the deskman who edits the news." He was, of course, referring to the English language, but it is also applicable to Arabic.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Instead of the state

As liberalisation continues apace, non-governmental organisations in the Arab world have proliferated in almost every field. There are organisations devoted to defending women's rights, others concerned with the impact of war on children. The scale and scope of NGO activities were clearly revealed at the second Arab NGO conference, held this week in Cairo. Amany Abdel-Moneim attended




photo: Salah Ibrahim

Extra income or literacy? The NGOs devoted to improving children's condition must provide a solution to this quandary

HRH Prince Talal Ben Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud, president of the follow-up committee for the Arab Non-governmental Organisation conference, inaugurated the Second Arab NGO Conference last Saturday at the Semiramis Intercontinental Hotel. It was the largest gathering the Arab region has seen. More than 900 participants, representing regional and international *Arab organisations, attended the three-day* event. Also present were numerous experts, Arab intellectuals and researchers, representatives from parliamentary councils, high-ranking Arab officials and journalists.

"This conference comes at a time when the Arab region is witnessing a growing awareness of the actual activities of NGOs, through major socio-economic development trends in the Arab world," said Prince Talal.

More than 500 Arab NGOs from 18 Arab countries participated in this conference. Representatives of the League of Arab States and its *various affiliates, Arab governments, private*-sector firms, and Arab and international funding agencies also attended. Also present were representatives from UN organisations, the Arab Gulf Programme for the United Nations Development Organisation (AGFUND), the International Bank and Arab and international environmental organisations.

All these participants heard 65 speakers; experts and representatives of international and regional NGOs participated in 22 concurrent plenary sessions and workshops.

The conference, apart from providing a *unique forum for NGO networking*, was also to enhance the practical activities of some of the organisations, or to showcase the traditional culture of the participating countries. Handicrafts (clothes and silver products); as well as posters, cards and books were on sale.

"This conference is the outcome of the follow-up committee's continuous efforts over about seven years," commented Dr Farida El-Alaqi, general coordinator of the committee.

The first Arab NGO conference was held in Cairo in 1989. The Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) participated in the financing and organisation of this first conference, attended by near*ly 400 participants representing Arab NGOs*, ministries of social affairs, the Arab League and its affiliated organisations, UN non-governmental federations and organisations, experts, the media, and public personalities.

Studies of Arab NGOs conducted by the follow-up committee in ten Arab countries on the eve of the 21st century have stressed the need for a regional entity allowing NGOs to exchange experiences, benefit from each other's work and build human and organisational capacities.

The political, economic and cultural changes *which have occurred on the regional and inter*national scene have led to a growing societal awareness of the role of the non-governmental sector in facing and tackling the consequences resulting from these changes.

Yet C. Muzio, a representative of UNDP, expressed the belief that it is important to strengthen the capacity and sustainability of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs/NGOs) and enhance the impact of their programmes. He also called for dialogue and collaboration between CSOs/NGOs and governments as well as other multilateral agencies to allow resource *mobilisation. "The UNDP will formulate um*brella programmes for the empowerment of CSOs/NGOs, with the aim of encouraging sustainable partnership between all sectors of society," said Muzio.

"There is a growing awareness of the importance and effectiveness of NGOs in the process of human development and the ability of NGOs to participate in elaborating solutions for the various problems related to development in the Arab world," stated Esmat Abdel-Meguid, secretary-general of the Arab League.

At the opening session, Prince Talal announced the establishment of the first national project for Arab NGOs, aimed at alleviating poverty, especially among children. The theme, Let's Work Together, hints at the organisers' goal of providing shelter for street children, and *establishing* a bank for the poor. The bank is targeting 100,000 families in its first stage of operation.

These *steps* and others like them may go some way towards alleviating the impact of rapid political, economic and social changes at the regional and international levels, which continue to affect such marginalised groups as women, children, young people and the poor.

Poverty, the legal status of NGOs, and women's and children's rights, important areas of NGO activity, constituted the focal points of many participants' statements. NGO activities *in the Arab world have already contributed to* mitigating some social inequalities and these organisations are therefore a powerful factor of political stability, said Dr Nadia Ramses Farah, director of the Cairo Centre for Development Studies. She also emphasised, however, that NGOs in most Arab countries are still shackled by state regulations developed by populist regimes. Farah cautioned that NGOs must be liberated from these constraints, if they are to become real partners in Arab socio-economic development and advocates of political stability. The 1990s have witnessed a growing tendency *toward the foundation of Arab NGOs, and the* emergence of new, specific types of programmes and projects implemented by these organisations. Laws and legislation governing NGO *activities* and *areas of action* still constitute a serious obstacle to the progress of the non-governmental sector, however.

Some participants had harsh words regarding current structural adjustment programmes, noting that liberalisation disregards the human dimension of social change and focuses instead on submission to the market economy. Mohamed Abed El-Jabri, in particular, remarked that the twin processes of privatisation and globalisation have replaced the slogan "socialism is the solution" by "liberalism is the solution". He also highlighted the dangers of "barbarous" liberalism within the Arab world:

"Privatisation and globalisation are widening the gab between rich and poor in general, as well as between poor and rich children, intensifying the structural dualities in Arab society," stressed Abed El-Jabri. "NGOs should be encouraged to draft an international declaration on the ethics of globalisation and development. This move requires the militant support of all civil society organisations to enforce declarations and make ethical behaviour part of the new world order," he declared.

During the 1990s, women's empowerment and the improvement of women's social status *have become focal points, in line with an em*phasis on the need for women to participate in the building of their societies. Though the conditions of Arab women have improved in certain respects during the past decade, there is still the urgent need for an "Arab vision of the Arab women's issue, a change in work methods, and new solutions to the vicious circles of underdevelopment which still impede the development of more that half the Arab population", said Emily Nafaa, the president of the Arab Women's Association in Jordan.

Another of the issues on the top of the agenda of the *Second Arab NGO Conference* was the status of children and childhood in the Arab world. The conference was designed to coordinate the efforts of NGOs and local and re*gional organisations to improve* children's lives and satisfy the needs of millions of Arab children, who continue to lack the most basic requirements. Emphasis was also placed on the importance of building up a network grouping all regional NGOs.

The management factor

"This committee was established in 1989, after the first Arab NGO conference. Since then, the committee has been working to implement the principal recommendations adopted by that conference. We have been trying for seven years now to establish major regional management training institutions. Management is an essential factor in the ability of Arab NGOs to achieve their objectives. The conference provides a forum for the discussion of NGO management and training problems. This discussion will tackle current management problems and bring about a qualitative shift in the management system as a whole. The conference will also call for the establishment of a code of ethics stressing *the moral principles underlying non-governmental action.* The clauses of this code will be discussed during the conference so as to ensure the codification of the relationship among NGOs, between NGOs, states and target populations, and between NGOs and the Arab and international funding agencies and organisations.

"In view of the achievements of the follow-up committee between 1989 and 1997, international organisations like the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the European Union (EU), the International Alliance for Citizen Participation (Civicus), and the Ford Foundation have participated in financing committee activities and projects. This is in addition to the regular funding offered to the *committee by the Arab Gulf Programme for United Na*tions Development Organisations (AGFUND) and the Arab Council for Childhood and Development (ACCD), which has been hosting the committee at its headquarters in Cairo, and providing administrative and technical assistance."

Farida El-Alaqi, *general coordinator of the Arab NGO follow-up committee*

Forum for exchange

"I am here in my capacity as an international civil servant. I feel very much a citizen of the Arab world, however, and I have been following these efforts for the past seven or eight years, almost a decade, to create this forum for exchange among non-governmental organisations in the Arab world. Global trends are placing increased pressure on civil society to deliver services that the government used to deliver. The conferences on population (Cairo), women (Beijing), housing (Istanbul) and *social development* (Copenhagen) *have all left* an enormous legacy to civil society at a time when there are scarce resources for social services but an increase in poverty and vulnerability. I think this is a fantastic forum, a great op*portunity to exchange experiences. The most important thing* is to agree to a code of conduct because the years to come are going to be tough years for our most vulnerable people.

"In addition to increased poverty, population density and unemployment, coupled with the lack of support for such basic sectors as health and education, and certain negative implications of economic reform policies, have all led to the expansion of NGOs' responsibilities. This forces us to offer more support to these organisations and help them reprioritise their areas of action, invest their human and financial resources and develop their actions at all levels. NGOs now are playing a major role in preserving the fabric of civil society. In countries at war, where there is a total breakdown of the state, NGOs are the only link with civil society, but even in normal conditions NGOs can reach the grassroots level. The UN is involving NGOs more and more in its work. This means not just lectures and consultative status: NGOs will be joining in partnerships from now on."



Nahla Haider, *United Nations, Department of Humanitarian Affairs*

Continued cooperation

"The Society was established nearly 23 years ago by my late father-in-law, Rashad El-Shawwa. My husband, Mansour El-Shawwa, is now the president. I started voluntary work recently, and the feeling that I am doing something good for people gives me great satisfaction.

Our Society is one of the biggest NGOs in Gaza. It was established in 1974. It has contributed much to the development of the Gaza Strip. We have four service centres, a child development centre which provides care for mothers and babies and treats genetic disorders, the rehabilitation centre for children with cerebral palsy, in addition to an ambulance service and a cultural centre. We used to have 35 ambulances serving Gaza, but we gave these to the Palestinian Authority during the uprising. NGOs play an important role, particularly in the Occupied Territories. In Palestine, for instance, we are suffering under the Israeli occupation, they are giving us a very hard time in Gaza. The Israeli government prevents Gazans from travelling to any other Arab country. My late father-in-law, however, who used to be the head of the Society, went personally to King Hussein and requested special exit permits for Gazans. As a result, students can now complete their education outside the Strip, and wives can join their husbands working in other Arab countries. To guarantee that they did not leave their land, my late father-in-law used to collect insurance from the people who left. He used this money to establish the cultural centre, expanded the other centres affiliated the institution and built schools. *He also donated medical equipment to hospitals*, and distributed winter clothes to Palestinian prisoners or their families at home. We raise funds mainly through our cultural centre, in addition to donations from King Hussein, Sheikh Zayed, the PLO, and Palestinians living abroad.

"This gathering gives us a very good opportunity to know all about other NGOs in our Arab world, their activities, progress, failure, and sources of funding. We must continue to cooperate. I also believe that we should give more attention to technical and practical issues. We rarely evaluate the work of every NGO or try to find practical solutions for the difficulties we face."



Abla El-Shawwa, *coordinator and general supervisor of the Gaza Strip Benevolent Society*



Mandy

I am not quite sure, now, how I met Mandy for the first time; it was *probably at some social function to which we had both* been invited. I soon discovered, however, that everyone I knew had met, befriended, or at least heard of her. She was the kind of person who had the capacity to cover maximum ground in the shortest possible time. She was young, smart and liked horses. She had come to Egypt to write her PhD thesis or a book or both, I don't remember, because, even much later, Mandy, who spoke about other people's business with abandon, remained quite reticent about her own.

On our first encounter, what I was told about her in brief did not inspire me with undue curiosity, and, had my attention not been attracted by one of her remarks, I would have dismissed her as one of the many butterflies who consume themselves trying to create the aura of the rich and famous. Asked by one of our friends why she was living in Egypt, she looked genuinely surprised. "Is there another place?" she inquired, smiling coyly. I immediately assumed that she was a kindred soul, one who, like me, found life in Egypt more exciting than anywhere else in *the world. We started talking. Soon we developed the habit of* doing so, on the telephone and at little dinner parties which we organised, inviting a few of our common friends over to her house or mine. It was obvious that Mandy frequented or at least lived on the fringe of the elite's pleasure domes. She had been to all the fashionable places and was familiar with all the intimate details of the lives and loves of Cairo's *Who's Who*.

A gifted storyteller and mimic, she could ape any accent, and continuously regaled her friends with audio-visual renditions of a day — or an hour — in the life of this or that amusing personality. She regularly had her audience in stiches. Her repertoire included stories about the grandmother who played watch-dog to all the family's money and would organise weekly seances to summon the spirit of her dead husband, who would invariably advise her to keep the family fortune intact under her direct control. Mandy played the grandmother and the grandfather's spirit in turn.

She described in great detail the sons and daughters, waiting every week for a favourable message from the netherworld, and their furious disappointment when the old lady emerged, more decided than ever to keep their inheritance firmly in her grip. There was also the story of the famous actress's telephone conversations with her plastic surgeon in the *US*, begging him to change her chin for the sixth time, and that of the obese little boy who, after his twice-weekly visit to the dietician, was treated to a double helping of chocolate ice cream with multiple top*pings by his mother; there were second wives'* tales, which started with "you will never guess who...", and which invariably involved car chases, lawyers falling in love with their clients or being subverted by the other party, and double-crossing maids who worked for the first and second wives at the same time, keeping the husband informed of the secret details of each one of his households.

We often played guessing games, with Mandy telling us a story, then refusing to reveal the identity of the characters. "Give me names," she would tell us, "and I'll tell you if you are right or wrong." Of course, in our eagerness to find out, many of us let slip secrets about our most intimate friends that we had sworn never to reveal and which Mandy picked up with relish, probably making a mental note to research them further at a later date.

In summer, Mandy used to disappear and, although the official version was that she went to visit her family in the States, rumour had it that she had been seen on such or such a fashionable beach, information which we working women rarely had time to check out. Besides, Mandy travelled fast, her trail hard to follow; she was simultaneously reported to be on the west and east coasts, attending a party here, a barbecue there; she was spotted at the airport going off on a weekend to Cyprus while friends were positive that they had seen her emerging from the arrival gate, coming from Athens. We were all dying to know where she really was, and during the long hot months every conversation in our group started with "Have you heard from Mandy?" Mandy-like, we endulged in our own guessing games about her whereabouts, which soon became the setting for adventures that we made up as we went along, casting Mandy in roles that were *usually less than flattering. Of course, we vaguely realised that*, if Mandy knew, she would cruelly vindicate herself, but who would ever tell her, we would ask each other, as we added new episodes to the Mandy epic; we had become a closely-knit group — or so we liked to think — and nothing would transpire. It was important, though, we warned each other, not to look guilty when Mandy returned from her forays at the end of the summer. We managed quite well for some time, then one autumn, we stopped hearing from Mandy. Collective guilt must have been quite strong by then, because none of us seriously tried to find out what had happened to her. Secretly suspecting each other of having blown the whistle on our gossipy evenings and told Mandy-stories to outsiders, we eventually drifted apart.

The other day, walking down a busy street, I came face to face with Mandy. I did not have time to retreat or even blush. "Hi there," she said, as if five years had not elapsed since our last meeting. "Have you heard the latest?" She had been in Katmandu, she informed me, with this crazy group who, she suspected, were members of a weird cult. "Boring," she said, "I had no one to talk about. Do you still have the same phone number?" Later, I found out by chance that she had been working in a hotel in Upper Egypt.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Fried veal liver

Ingredients:

3/4 kg veal liver
One tbsp. crushed garlic
5 tbsp. white wine
One tbsp. butter ghee
Salt + pepper + allspice

Method:

Have the liver cut into thin slices. Season them with salt, pepper and allspice. In a large frying pan melt the butter ghee, add the crushed garlic, stir it in and gently fry it, then place the liver slices on top so that each slice is placed flat in the pan. On a high flame, turn *the slices over and fry on the* other side until they brown (a couple of minutes), then add the wine and stir the liver slices so that the wine is slightly absorbed.

Cover for one or two minutes, still over high heat. Remove from heat, uncover and stir. There should be some brown sauce in the pan. If not, add two or three tablespoonfuls of very hot water, return to high heat for one minute and remove. Serve hot with spaghetti or mashed potatoes and a rich green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Breakfast in

Andrew Steele longs for the great outdoors

A short time back, someone removed the air from Swissair restaurants and they became plain old Swiss. Little has changed. Not breakfast at the Chantilly in any case. Prices are a little higher, the egg chef and his cooking wagon have re-located to the smoking area, the garden is still, however a very pleasant place to sit. Walled and green and, for the most part, covered, for lunch and din*ner it throngs* with the Heliopolis *smart set* and scattered posses of foreign diners and drinkers.

Breakfast is a more sedate affair, set among the stained wooden beams and under slatted pine ceilings of the restaurant's interior. Alpine scenes and ruddy Swiss farmer types stirring bubbling fondues adorn the walls. I began with a double espresso to *blow away the remnants of the night before* and a large, black humdinger of a cup of coffee it was too. For those less practised as myself in heavy caffeine abuse, it came *with a jug of warm milk* to take the edge off.

So to the breakfast menu. It would be churlish to call it unimaginative as breakfast rarely lends itself to haute cuisine, and certainly I can well understand the stress involved by anyone who has to deal with a fully fledged kitchen first thing in the morning. And there can be little doubt that Chantilly's fridges are rather better stocked than my own, containing eggs, juices, "bakings" and all the necessary ingredients for a far from modest Swiss Buffet breakfast.

Having eyed the buffet *upon arrival* (the "bakings" seemed to play a large part in its composition) and wanting something a little lighter, I decided to conjure memories of the local greasy spoon of my youth and plumped for scrambled eggs on toast. Barely a minute after my order was placed, the egg chef arrived at his wagon and drizzled oil onto his skillet. What emerged was just right.

There is nothing I dislike more than a mound of solid scrambled eggs which I find can have the texture and consistency of a foam rubber pillow. Few things can be so unappealing, or guaranteed to get you off on the wrong foot in the morning. At Chantilly, though, the eggs were light and slightly runny, although not to the extent of being wet. The portion was generous too, the eggman cracking three of his ovular wares into the skillet.

The toast on the other hand was wet as wet can be. Toast, in Egyptian Arabic, of course refers to a white, sliced loaf with no presupposition that it has just propped up, brown and crunchy. Nor had it here. This was offset by the presence of a delicious crusty whole wheat roll from Le Chantilly's correctly famous bakery. The service was friendly and efficient and, without undue hovering, a waiter was always there when you wanted one. All in all then, a most satisfactory way to start the day, and with a bill for eggs, coffee and orange juice costing a mere twenty pounds not too huge a dent on the wallet, if only they'd open the garden gates...

Le Chantilly, 11 Baghdad Street, Korba, Heliopolis.

Al-Ahram Weekly

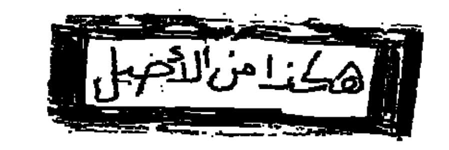
Crossword

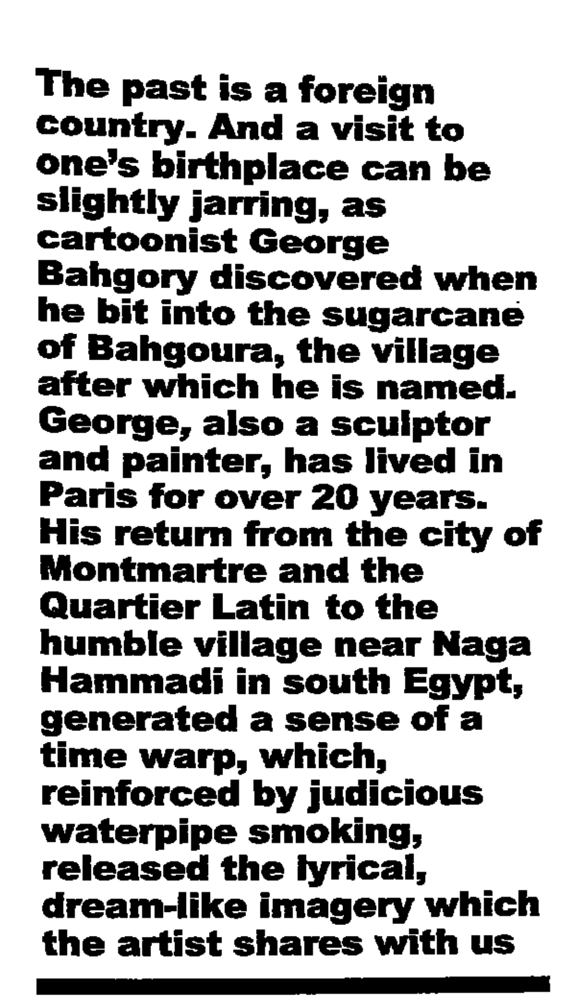
By Samia Abdennour

Across
1. Outer sheath of tree trunks (4)
5. The Bear (4)
9. Rose spinel ruby (5)
14. Genus of bitter herbs (4)
15. Level; row (4)
16. Binary compound of chemical O (5)
17. Smeared with sticky material made from holly bark and spread on twigs to catch birds (4)
18. Without luster (4)
19. Sovereign's assembly for men (5)
20. Miss Braun (3)
21. Put on (3)
22. Ogle (3)
24. Terminal (3)
25. A medical specialist (7)
27. Place of refuge; coffer (3)
29. *Crumbs* (3)
30. Valiant (8)
35. Flintlike form of quartz (5)
38. Marine mammal; act done as confirmation (4)
39. Stupefying drug (4)
40. Bulgarian money 93)
41. Strongholds (5)
42. Human beings (3)
43. God of War (4)
45. Asian country (4)
46. Individually 95)
48. Upper hemisphere (8)
50. Implication (3)
51. Tree often planted in churchyards (3)
52. Chalet (7)
56. Step (3)
59. Cleopatra's murderer (3)
61. Expression of surprised pleasure (3)
62. My_ Sal (3)
63. Break in; record(5)
65. Pleasure-beach (4)
67. Volcano matter (4)
68. Hoards; lays by (5)
69. *Affirm* (4)
70. Ceremoniously declare a building as complete for use (4)
71. Kind of tent (5)
72. Following; lying nearest to (4)
73. Asexualise (4)

Down
1. Bundled (5)
2. Animate (5)
3. An ancient European language (5)
4. Solution; allows entrance (3)
5. Extreme (6)
6. Jocular (5)
7. Place (3)
8. *Skills* (4)
9. A Ravel composition (6)
10. Chopper (3)
11. *On the air* (4)
12. Arab port (4)
13. Embryo; origin (4)
21. Squalor (4)
23. Noblemen (5)
26. Devon rocky peak (3)
28. A baby animal farm (3)
30. A wading bird (5)
31. Dines (4)
32. Stupor; prolonged sleep (4)
33. Mimic (4)
34. Advanced (4)
35. Coterie (4)
36. Champion; ideal specimen (4)
37. At all times (4)
38. Take to the air (4)
41. Hanging lips of bloodhound (5)
44. Pig's home (3)
46. Car (4)
47. Loved one (3)
49. Part of funeral accoutrement (6)
50. Colleague; persons handed together (6)
52. Manuscript of ancient texts (5)
53. open-mouthed with wonder (5)
54. Judge's hammer (5)
55. Large African antelope (5)
56. Gadfy (4)
57. Poker stake (4)
58. Desist (4)
60. Layout; schedule; line up (4)
64. Female sheep (3)
65. I have, abb. (3)
67. Ship's record (3)

Last week's solution

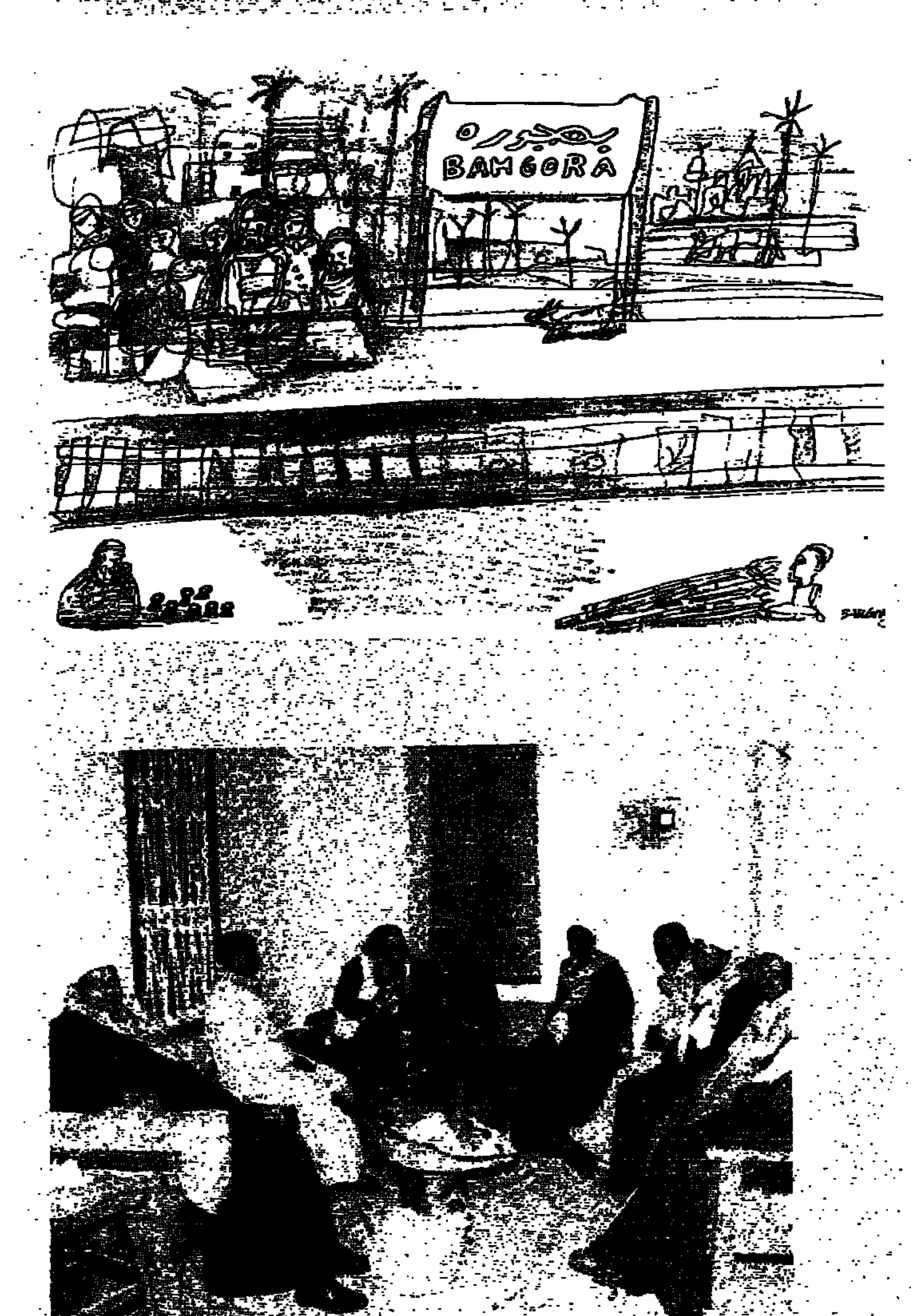




The past is a foreign country. And a visit to one's birthplace can be slightly jarring, as cartoonist George Bahgory discovered when he bit into the sugarcane of Bahgoura, the village after which he is named. George, also a sculptor and painter, has lived in Paris for over 20 years. His return from the city of Montmartre and the Quartier Latin to the humble village near Naga Hammadi in south Egypt, generated a sense of a time warp, which, reinforced by judicious waterpipe smoking, released the lyrical, dream-like imagery which the artist shares with us



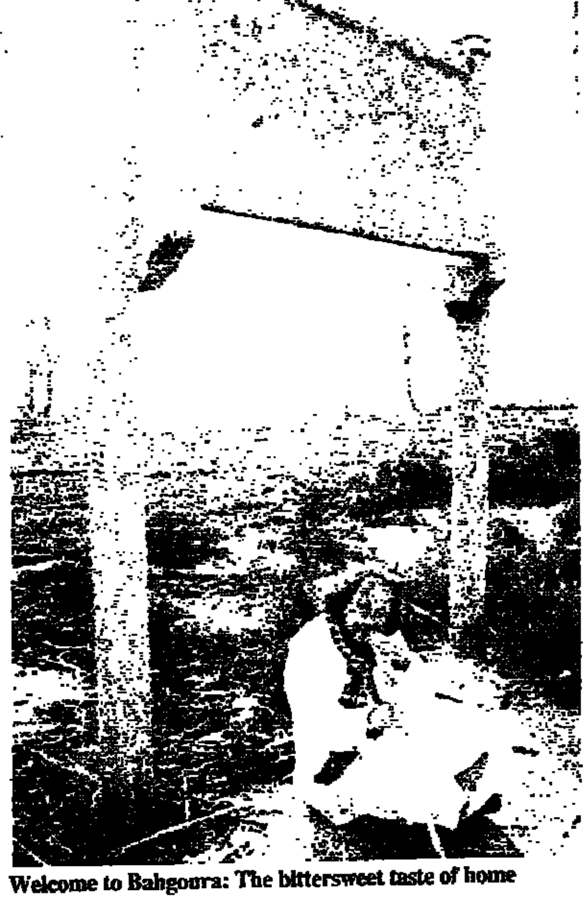
The tough sweetness of home



A stranger among friends: What else, but the smell of tobacco leaves?



Quick study: George gives bemused spectators a sample of his speed sketching



Welcome to Bahgoura: The bittersweet taste of home



A kingdom for a horse: At the corner of memory lane



Battle-scarred and the wrong side of sixty. I pause. Looking back, I wonder. Is it time to rejoice, to brood, or mull over a life rich in variety and never done with love?

My breath, should it not be mingled with the smoke of a *narjila* stuffed with tobacco leaves? The air, should it not be scented with the aroma of bygone days? For the sugarcane harvested in my village Bahgoura, I long. Bahgoura, land of my childhood, receptacle of my dreams, here I come.

A flood of memories comes rushing from the past, spitting and sputtering, haunting and taunting. My weary heart flinches. The throb of my existence skips a beat, lets out a whisper.

A roar echoes in my ears, turns into a purr, into a song. The wild bird of art flies high and perches on a red frond of a palm tree, vaguely familiar.

When I am down and out, when I wish I could crawl back into my mother's womb, I long for Bahgoura, womb of my existence, oasis of my sahara.

In Cairo, I meet an old pal, journalist Abul-Abbas. He says, "Old boy, come, let us go together to Bahgoura, I usually stay close by, in Abu Tesht or Abu Shousha."

A night in a train and, at sunrise, there it is. Chirping like a bird, open like the horizon, the land we call home.

Abul-Abbas had arranged for *Al-Ahram* photographer Ayman Barayez to come with us. Ayman sleeps his way through most of the train journey and beyond. He dozes off in the coffee house and the plantations but somehow manages to take some inspired photos. Had it not been for my village friend, I would have been a virtual stranger in my own village. My relatives, at least those my age, no longer live there. I am told that Khawaga Salidis, my eldest relative, has passed away. Lonely and helpless, we turn — where else? to church for comfort. Father Shenouda feeds and entertains us. After drinking the famous Bahgouri tea, the Father points to a narrow alley nearby and says "I made some inquiries and learnt that you were born in the house at the corner of this alley."

Down a memory lane of mud and cattle dung, we walk. I am now in the midst of a crowd of my village folk. Overwhelmed by their welcoming noises, I feel bewildered. Steps unsure, like the first tentative ones I took here a lifetime ago, I plod on.

The door of the house in which I was born is locked. Carlo, an old neighbour, now in his nineties, says "Here, my son, is where your grandfather's brother lived, he was never married." I had heard about my great-uncle. He was the only member of my family who owned land and a granary. Family members liked to talk about him.

I touch the wooden planks of the ancient door. With a piece of chalk borrowed from the rural school next door, I draw the face of the child who once sat at this doorstep. The child that was me.

Sitting with friends on the river bank, we chew on sugarcane. The good-byes, a while later, have the sugarcane's tough, fibrous sweetness.

Accid will happen

As pleasure-seekers turn to adventure sports, emergency medical services become indispensable in tourist resorts. **Rehab Saad** investigates

Choosing a travel destination is not all you need to have an enjoyable and safe vacation. Whether you wish to climb mountains, sunbathe on the beach, or visit ancient sites, you have to make sure that you will get appropriate medical help where and when you need it.

Aware that today's pleasure-seekers include discerning adventurers who want the best facilities, health or otherwise, when they travel, the Tourist Development Authority (TDA) has prepared a study evaluating emergency services in the Red Sea region.

The study looks into the treatment of recreational accidents related to diving and other activities. It focuses on the Hyperbaric Therapeutic Centre (HTC), a decompression facility at Sharm El-Sheikh which the Ministry of Tourism built with a grant from the US Agency for International Development.

The study finds resuscitation procedures and general emergency treatment care to be satisfactory, but it recommends that the HTC be expanded to incorporate an emergency care centre (ECC).

"This facility should be capable of resuscitation procedures and the treatment of life-threatening conditions. Once stabilised, patients could be safely evacuated to Cairo or overseas for definitive care," the study suggests.

Diving is a growth industry. It is estimated that about 10 million people pursue recreation and sport diving worldwide, with thousands more joining the ranks every year. Egypt is one of the world's most popular destinations for the sport.

The Gulf of Aqaba offers some of the finest diving spots worldwide. From Taba in the north to Ras Mohamed, some 240km to the south, there are about 70 diving sites of international renown, 35 of which are in or close to Sharm El-Sheikh. So far, the only decompression centre for treatment of diving accidents is in Sharm El-Sheikh.

Scuba divers participate in a variety of underwater activities, including archaeology and wreck diving, underwater photography, and sightseeing, all of which involve risks, mostly preventable. Accidents, however, happen.

The emergency medical services in the *Red Sea region, officials promise, will* soon be upgraded, making Egypt both an enjoyable and a safe destination for thousands of adventure travellers.





The diver takes risks but help is now at hand; as for the corals, they are still threatened by boats that take passengers from Sharm El-Sheikh to off-shore reefs *photos: Sherif Sonbol*

Coral communities under threat

How will the Red Sea and its marine life fare into the 21st century? **Sherine Nasr** looks at efforts made to pursue a policy of preservation

Tourism experts and ecologists are more concerned than ever as evidence of environmental degradation of Egypt's natural heritage is traced to uncontrolled development. "A recent underwater assessment of the coral reefs of the Red Sea has revealed the destruction of a large number of coral reef communities, with Hurghada as the most afflicted area," said Ahmed Nawar, director of the National Institute for Oceanography and Fishery in the Red Sea.

In view of the constant threat to the environment, Egyptian as well as international donors are taking the necessary *measures to protect Egypt's shores and* marine life, recognising that these are among the main tourist assets of the country and the target for the anticipated 21st century tourist boom.

A three-day conference organised by the Red Sea Governorate, the Hurghada Marine Club and Mercalf & Eddy, an international environment consulting firm with 30 years of experience in Egypt, brought together parties concerned with the welfare of the Red Sea in an effort to integrate their activities. "Clearly touristic development is closely linked to the protection and management of natural resources and coastlines," said Salah Hafez, Executive Director of the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA).

Ecologist Robert Reimold noted that it is time to adopt a clear-cut policy towards marine life in Egypt. "We have to decide whether to preserve it, that is to say keep it absolutely intact, or to conserve it in the sense of using it wisely," he said adding, "a balance between preservation and conservation is the most ideal scenario."

USAID's Environmental Sustainable Tourism (EST), initiated a rapid underwater assessment at key diving sites along *the coast. "[The assessment] is concentrat*ed in Quseir. Once complete, the data will be collated and published for the benefit of diving sites and professional ecologists," said David Smith, the project manager. The study will provide the base *line for environmental experts to evaluate* the condition of coral reefs and assess their condition in the coming decades.

For one, the process of mooring buoys to safeguard the reefs is well underway. Two hundred and fifty are currently being *installed in Hurghada, Safaga and Quseir* to stop anchors from destroying the reefs. The EEAA employs rangers to make sure the buoys are properly used by both private boat owners and fishermen. "The rangers are also in charge of monitoring diving activities at the different sites and reporting on violations," he said.

Specific attention is now being given to the 24 offshore islands. These were declared national reserves in the 1980s. "There are at least 100 boats visiting the big Giftun, the most famous of these islands, on a daily basis. But there is no garbage management there and the environment was being degraded," said Sayed Median, head of the National Protectorate in the Red Sea area.

The first step taken to curb the damage was to demolish the 16 bamboo huts set up to serve food and drinks. "They were hardly harmonious with the natural surroundings and garbage was always left over," said Median. He explained that the island has now been cleared of debris and garbage is being transported back to Hur*ghada for disposal. "Meanwhile, a plan* for developing these islands is now being studied by the EEAA to determine what type of environmentally friendly construction is the most suitable," he explained.

Other islands, such as the rocky island *of St John's and the Brothers' island have* now been closed for a year for maintenance. "They will be reopened only when the mooring buoys have been installed," said Median.

The Ministry of Tourism, together with the EEAA and the Red Sea Governorate, is publishing a guide book of the Red Sea coast with details on diving sites, offshore islands and how to reach them, as well as the location of the mooring buoys and how to use them. In addition, information on the protection of marine life is provided. Other areas along the Red Sea coast will soon be declared protected areas said Mahmoud Khamis El-Sayed, operations manager of Global Environmental Facility (GEF).

"Satellite mapping has enabled us to study the area from Quseir to Ras Banas to determine where fragile ecosystems exist and to decide on where more reserves are required," said Khamis. He was referring to the 700km-coastline extending from the north of Hurghada, south to Halaib on the Egyptian-Sudanese border. "The main objective is to ensure that development is consistent with sound environmental management," he said. Five million pounds have been allocated to the project to establish laboratories to combat marine pollution and establish an environ*mental monitoring unit of the Red Sea.*

The first academic institution to contribute to the protection of the Red Sea life, the National Institute for Oceanography and Fishery, is now suffering from a lack of funds. "The aquarium and the marine museum affiliated to the institute were once among the best worldwide," said Nawar. The 700 marine creatures on display included mermaids and varieties of sharks that are now rarely found in their natural habitat. "It is about time to consider a new aquarium," said Nawar.

An interesting experiment now being carried out by the institute is the attempt to foster some fast growing coral reefs in underwater pools to be later planted in areas where the greatest damage has occurred. This may prove to be an effective way to grow small colonies of corals because the damage rate in some places around Hurghada is almost 90 per cent.

Aida, bigger than ever

JOURNALISTS from the US, Italy, France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom met Tourism Minister Mamdouh El-Beltagui to discuss promotion plans for the staging of Opera Aida at Hatshepsut Temple in Luxor, scheduled for 12 to 17 October.

The Opera House, tourism officials, and the Luxor municipality are involved in the staging which El-Beltagui promises "will be a bigger affair than ever before."

Hundreds of tourists are expected to come to Egypt specially for the event.

Italian familiarisation

THE ITALIAN "Touring Club" is planning a familiarisation trip for its members to Egypt in September/October. The club has about half a million members, and 300 to 600 of them will embark on this trip.

London to Alex, direct

ALEXANDRIA has gained a toehold on the international flights map. British Airways has inaugurated a direct line from London to Alexandria, involving three flights a week (Tuesdays, Fridays, Sundays).

BA jetliners will be going on from Alexandria to Damascus, returning to the Egyptian coast city a few hours later for its direct return to London.

"I am very happy that we are the first airline to operate direct flights from Alexandria to London," said BA director Andy Stevens.

Gulf promotion

TOURISM Minister El-Beltagui is due to tour Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. The visit will coincide with an advertising campaign in the Gulf media.

Saudi Arabia tops the list of Arab tourism in Egypt, with over 200,000 visitors in 1996. Kuwait is second and Syria is third, according to official figures from the Egyptian Tourist Authority.

Fayoum development

INTERESTED in developing Fayoum? This was the theme of a symposium organised recently by the Tourism and Hotels College in Fayoum University. Experts present at the symposium proposed the preparation of brochures, posters, a documentary and a directory for investors about the area.

Tours on bicycles

ABOUT 500 Britons have just cycled their way to Luxor and Aswan. The trip was organised by the Egyptian Tourism Authority. A similar trip will be organised in South Sinai in October.

"This is good promotion for Egypt (which hopes) to attract sports' lovers from all over the world," said ETA head Adel Abdel-Aziz.

Flying history

A US DOCUMENTARY film director has made a round-the-world trip emulating a similar one that took place in 1937. Doug Miller stopped over in Egypt during the trip, flying in the same helicopter used in the original trip.

Ministry upgrading

QUALITY is a major concern for the Ministry of Tourism. Its new research and training programs for the fiscal year 1997/98 comprise language and computer training for the ministry's officials as well as awareness courses for tour guides, tourist police, hoteliers and travel agents.

*Compiled by **Rehab Saad***

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm *return from Almaza and Tahrir* Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, *then Giza and Almaza. Departs* Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, *Alexandria. Departs Hurghada* 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company

Buses travel to North/South Sinai
Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qulali (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tagnid Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez
Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE21; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.
Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba
Service 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus Company

Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safaga
Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Quseir
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan
Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm *(reaching Luxor* 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Torbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE36.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, LE1143 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE259 for Egyptians, LE829 for foreigners, both round-trip.
Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE898 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE945 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Egyptian tourism on the Internet

Here are some useful addresses on the Internet, including tourism magazines, archaeology and travel agency programmes:

http:// www.idsc.gov.eg/links.htm is an address through which you can access other useful tourism addresses on the Internet. Here they are:

http://www.idsc.gov.eg/tourism is the address of Egypt's Tourism Net which provides directories of Egypt's hotels, restaurants, cruise lines, travel agents, transportation companies and tourist attractions. Egypt's tourism net is a part of many home pages (culture, health, environment, etc) created by the IDSC as a part of the nation's Information Highway.

http://163.121.10.41/tourism is the key to Egypt Has It All, where Egypt's tourist sites, such as the Red Sea, Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, the Sinai, Alexandria, oases and ETA offices abroad are described. The magazine also contains colour photographs of Egypt.

http://www.memphis.edu/egypt/egypt.htm is the address of the University *of Memphis, and describes their* projects in Egypt.

http://www-ceg.ceg.uiuc.edu/~haggag/travel.html is the address of Egypt's Tours and Travel, which organises packages for people who want to take quality tours. It is an Egyptian tour operator, which specialises in tours within Egypt, the Holy Land and the Middle East.

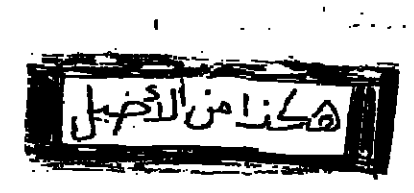
http://www.geocities.com/TheTropics/7210 is the address of The Curse of the Pharaohs. It includes photographs of ancient tombs and temples.

http://www.ezy.be/horses is the address of The Arabian Horse Worldwide Guide. This guide aims to promote the world's most beautiful and versatile horse — the Arabian.

http://intercoz.com/egypt is a 2,000-page magazine, published by the Ministry of Tourism, where all Egyptian tourist sites are listed and described.

http://watt.seas.virginia.EDU/~aoa5u/city is the address of the magazine *Cairo Scene*, Cairo's first on-line art and entertainment guide. It is the most up-to-date source on where to go and what to do in Cairo. It has also sections for books and the latest CD's besides proposed places to visit like Wadi Rayyan.

http://watt.seas.virginia.EDU/~aoa5u is the site of Exodus Egypt, a daily site covering home news including political, social and cultural events.



Handballers go for gold

The Park Dome *in the Japanese town* of Kumamoto hosted the opening ceremony of the 15th Handball World Championships with a blaze of colour and ceremony. **Inas Mazhar** was there

The opening ceremony of the 15th annual Handball World Championships took place on Saturday. Events kicked off with the athletes' parade, in which the players *tossed miniature* balls into the audience. There followed a dramatic representation of a turbulent Pacific Ocean which calmed and parted to reveal the kimono-clad women of the Kumamoto Recreational Dance Society. *The* neighbouring Mount Aso was portrayed as a goddess ascending into the heavens. Keiko Nakashima emerged to sing the Japanese national anthem and then stole the show with a rendition of 'Amazing Grace'.

The festivities continued with brief speeches by Isao Yonekura, chairman of the organising committee, Nabil Salem, the international handball representative and Prince and Princess Takamado of the Japanese royal family. The ceremony climaxed with Nakashima leading audience and performers in a rendition of the championship's theme song.

An opening match was then played between the hosts and Iceland, ending in a 24-20 victory by the more experienced Icelanders.

These are the first Handball World Championships to be held outside Europe. Located on the west of the southern Japanese island of Kyushu, Kumamoto is 1,072km from Tokyo and 631km from Seoul. The island is mountainous and heavily forested — nearly 70 per cent of Kumamoto province, which takes its name from the town, *is covered in woodland. To the* east lies Aso, an extinct volcano. The volcano and its surrounding area have been designated as the Aso-Kuju National Park.

The tournament involves the combined efforts of around 2,000 athletes, officials and organisers. The teams are divided into four groups of six teams each, and between *17-25 May, 60* preliminary matches will be played. The top four teams in each group will go on to the final tournament from 27 May to 1 June, consisting of 20 matches played at two different venues.

The competition began on Sunday with 12 matches — three in each group. In Group A, playing in Kumamoto, Yugoslavia defeated Japan 22-19, Lithuania beat Saudi Arabia 27-18 and Algeria gave a surprising performance to draw 27-27 with Ireland.

In Group B, also playing in Kumamoto, defending champions France defeated newcomers Italy 25-21, while Sweden outlasted Argentina 36-17, and Norway and Korea drew 21-21.

In Group C, playing in Yamaga, Portugal scored a 26-18 victory over Brazil, while Egypt beat the Czech Republic 24-22. Spain, the group's strongest team, beat Tunisia 32-21.

In Group D, playing in Yatshiro, Russia overpowered Cuba 31-17, Croatia defeated China 34-21 and Hungary beat Morocco 25-19.

Monday was a rest day for groups B and C, while groups A and D continued playing, allowing Yugoslavia to accomplish its second victory against Lithuania 29-21. Meanwhile Russia outfaced China 34-15.

Groups A and D took the day off on Tuesday, and play continued for all groups yesterday and today. *Tomorrow, however, is a rest day for all* the teams. Players will be able to enjoy free tours of Kumamoto City and take advantage of free telephone calls to anywhere in the world.



Hands tied

THE EGYPTIAN national handball team failed to score a much-needed victory *over* Spain at 7.00am on Tuesday, Cairo time. It was Egypt's second game in the Tokyo World Cup. The game was a cliff-hanger until the final eight seconds, when Egypt flubbed its opportunity to score. Egypt led throughout much of the first half, although Spain drew before half-time.

During the second half, the teams were neck and neck, each pulling on goal ahead of the other before falling back again, until Spain managed to secure a two-goal lead. Egypt then drew, and the teams were even when the final whistle blew, ending the match a 19/19 draw.

Egypt has never won a game against Spain. It lost four previous encounters: one at the Olympics, two World Championships and Al-Ahram Championship a month ago. Today, Egypt plays Tunisia while the Czech Republic plays Portugal in the Group C matches. The teams will take a rest tomorrow, and the competition resumes on Saturday.



Championship facts

'97 Men's World Handball Championship in Kumamoto Japan 1997·5/17 ► 6/1

Symbol

THE SYMBOL of a man throwing a handball is coloured red, green and blue. The red colour of the ball symbolises both the athletes' sporting passion and Kumamoto, 'the land of fire'. The green of the figure symbolises the mutual understanding *fostered through handball and the green city of Kumamoto.* The hand is coloured blue, symbolising world peace.



Mascot

HYUTA, the championship mascot, is based on a Japanese skylark. The name 'Hyuta' was chosen from 9,236 entries submitted in a public naming competition.

Legendary players

THE CHAMPIONSHIPS' organising committee has honoured 15 top players going for gold in Kumamoto as 'legendary players'. The list includes Egypt's Sameh Abdel-Wareth. The citation describes him as a top scorer, symbolic of Egypt's remarkable development in the game. Abdel-Wareth is famed for his 15 goals against Romania in the championships in Sweden in 1993. His personal style, slinging a handball as if it were a baseball, allows Abdel-Wareth to release ultra-high-speed shots, including under and step shots.



Zamalek's player trying to score a goal passing Ahli players in Cup tournament *photo: Amr Gamal*

Zamalek do the double

Zamalek's basketballers have been unstoppable *this season, crowning their* success with victory in both the league and cup this week. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** reports

Cairo Stadium's Indoor Hall I was the scene of two Zamalek triumphs within four days last week. After five years of defeat, Zamalek's basketballers came in from the cold to enjoy victory in both the Egyptian Cup and the National League. Their season's winning streak has been marred by just one defeat, by Ahli in a league tournament match.

Zamalek's five-year slump was due to a combination *of their low standard of performance* and improved play on the part of rivals Ittihad of Alexandria and Gezira. In addition, many of Zamalek's experienced players had taken up professional opportunities abroad: Samir Gouda in Turkey, Sherif El-Sanadilli in the United States and Hesham Abu Seri in South Africa. The return of these players to Zamalek this season, and the addition of two new team members *from Mali, Lamin and Souri, meant* that Zamalek began the season with a strong edge.

In the final league game, played before 10,000 fans, Zamalek overcame the mighty Ittihad of Alexandria. The runners-up suffered from the absence of Ismail Ahmed, their pivot, who had broken his nose in his previous match. But this loss aside, it was obvious during the match that Ittihad's team are ageing. Third-placed Ahli, most *of whose* members are juniors with plenty of fitness and talent, now look more likely to be the team of the future.

There were some incidents of hooliganism after the match — by both Ahli and Zamalek fans — which resulted in the federation imposing fines on both clubs.

A mere three days later, Zamalek met Ahli for the Cup Final. *Ahli, last year's Cup Final* winners, were determined to hold on to their trophy. Zamalek were equally determined to wrest it from them.

The two teams had met a week previously in a league match, a high-scoring clash in which Zamalek beat their rivals 102-81 — the first time that Zamalek has exceeded one hundred points.

The Cup Final match was just as exciting, although the score was a much lower 81-64. Ahli's players were not on form. In particular, the young key player Tarek El-Ghannam, on whom Ahli relies for height, skill and fitness, was playing random passes and shots and making many errors throughout the game. On the other hand, a confident Zamalek used the match to demonstrate advanced skills and difficult moves. For example, Lamin would pass the ball quickly to Hesham Abu Seri, even though he was in a position to shoot himself, allowing Abu Seri to shoot a three pointer. At one point, Ahli coach Ashraf Tawfik became so enraged by this kind of play that he kicked Abu Seri from the sidelines as Abu Seri reached to catch a ball before it went out. Although there is little excuse for this lack of sportsmanship, many felt sorry for Tawfik, who was unable to stop his tears at the end of the match.

Lamin was named best player in both the league and the cup and awarded LE500. Ashraf *El-Kurdi of Gezira was the top scorer in the* league and Sherif El-Sanadilli was the top three-pointer scorer in the cup.



Mansoura's player fighting for the goal *photo: Mohamed Wassim*

Egypt's lucky strike

Egypt rejoices as its three football teams qualify for the quarter-final of the African Champion League and African Cup Winners Cup, and the junior team make the semi-final of the African Nations Cup. **Abeer Anwar** reports

Sun does eventually follow rain, and after a long dark period of defeat in Africa, Egypt basked in the glory of four successive victories in their African meetings this week. Zamalek set the ball rolling by beating Zambia's Mufulira Wanderers 1-0 in Zambia in the second leg match to qualify for the quarter- final of the African Champions' League Championship.

All Zamalek needed was to lose 0-2 or draw to qualify for the quarter-finals, after beating Mufulira 5-2 in the first leg match played in Cairo last week. But the team was determined to continue its winning streak, having won the Champions League a recordbreaking fourth time last year. Ahmed El-Kas scored the winning goal in the 9th minute of the first half, and Nader El-Sayed, Zamalek's goalkeeper was named man of the match.

After the match, the jubilant Zamalek players were each awarded $200, an on-the-spot prize for their victory which has won Zamalek the $150,000 set by the CAF for qualifying for the quarter-finals. Zamalek coach Farouk El-Sayed expressed his happiness saying "The team played their best and were united under the leadership of El-Kas." Mufulira coach Lwanda Milla commented, "The Zamalek team was luckier and was able to make it to the quarter- finals as we were poorly refereed in Cairo and it was too late for us to do something today. The players lost hope."

In Botswana, Egypt's national junior team beat Côte d'Ivoire 2-0 in the African Nations Cup Championship before an elated crowd of 40,000 Botswanan fans. The team played with talent and enthusiasm, and by beating Cote d'Ivoire, came out on top of Group A to qualify for the semi-final. The winner and runner-up in the African Nations Juniors Cup will qualify for the World Juniors Cup, which will take place in Egypt this September. Egypt being the host country, the Egyptian team qualifies automatically, but team technical *manager Dr Mohamed Ali explained,* "It *was a good chance* to get in contact with other strong teams...as this team does not have enough international experience due to their young age." Ahmed Belal and El-Khatib Mesleh scored the winning goals in the 39th minute of the first half and 52nd minute of the second half respectively. "The players were also playing under the stress of their exams. They sit for their *thanaweya amma* exams in the morning and play their matches in the afternoon," added Mohamed Ali. Côte d'Ivoire coach George Michael had only one comment: "That's football."

At Cairo's El-Gabal El-Akhdar Stadium, Arab Contractors rounded off what was a miserable weekend for Zambia by trouncing Nchanga Rangers 3-0 to qualify for the quarter-finals of the African Cup Winners Cup, with Mohamed Abdel-Fattah, Abdel-Aziz Mustafa and Atef Abdel-Hadi scoring the winning goals. After the match, Mohamed Abdel-Samie, Arab Contractors' technical manager commented, "the team did their best to win the match but they were tense after losing five consecutive national matches."

Mansoura also qualified for the quarter-finals of the African CupWinners Cup by beating Julius Berger from Nigeria 2-0 at Mansoura Stadium, with Ayman Moheb and Walid Salah the goal-scorers. After the match, each player was given a *LE2,000 prize by* Fakhreddin Khaled, *the governor of* Mansoura.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Abdel-Badie El-Qamhawi: Try, try again

In the '60s and '70s, he used a blackboard and chalk. In the '90s, he devised a computer programme to help those unable to read and write learn their own language. He is more nitty-gritty than glitterati, but this literacy educator and maths teacher is more famous than a movie star



photo: Salah Ibrahim

On the tram, a man stands up and offers him a seat; the conductor refuses to take the price of the ticket, because El-Qamhawi resembles that kind gentleman on television. El-Qamhawi asks: "What makes you think I am not that man?" The reply: "But the other man does not use a walking stick."

The programme he devised to teach illiterates how to read and write also familiarises students with computers. The user sees the letter and hears the way it is pronounced. Then the computer prompts the user to click on the corresponding letter. When he or she does so, the letter dances to a little tune. A wrong response prompts a sad face and a voice ordering: "Try again". El-Qamhawi won a prize in a computer competition for this programme. Child's play? But for adults, learning to read and write is no piece of cake. By making it easier, El-Qamhawi has taken a huge step towards alleviating the plague that is illiteracy.

Abdel-Badie El-Qamhawi was born in Menia El-Qamh, in Sharqiya. He was a disobedient child, but the whole town participated in his education. When Hillary Clinton wrote *It Takes a Village...*, she probably did not envisage so literal an interpretation. "Be polite, Qamhawi's son, I know you" — the phrase was forever ringing in his ears. No one in Menia El-Qamh ever said "It's none of my business." El-Qamhawi underwent a somewhat disparate formal education, from the *kuttab* (Qur'an school) to university.

His father, a merchant, was one of the first men in the town to learn a foreign language. He went to Alexandria to learn French. He was wealthy, and the expense of the journey posed no obstacle, but desire to learn a foreign language seemed strange to the other townspeople. The family was large — El-Qamhawi is one of ten children — but the house was always open, with neighbours popping in and out, free to borrow or take whatever they wanted — especially water, since the family owned a water pump, a rare commodity in those days. Books were another luxury the family enjoyed in abundance. He read most of the books in his father's big library. He used to wear a jacket over his *galabiya*, its pockets bulging with novels. In school, he rewrote a novel to discover its secret: what was it that captivated him in the plot and style?

His mother was always his main point of reference. He remembers a childhood filled with the stories she told. When he started his literacy programme, he asked her how to explain that the Arabic alphabet contains 28 letters. She told him to say that the alphabet is equal to quarter of an Egyptian pound and three piastres. It was her ability to interpret abstractions and render them concrete and easy to understand that made her experience invaluable to him.

Maybe this closeness explains his sensitivity to the problems faced by women today, who receive precious little help from the community. "Egyptian women are far more tired today than they were in the past, although the amount of work that requires actual physical effort has decreased. Stress has increased immensely."

When he first came to Cairo, El-Qamhawi was fascinated by the paths inlaid with coloured pebbles at the Zoo. He went to see Ismail Yassin with one of his colleagues, who refused to buy a ticket, preferring to save his pocket money. El-Qamhawi, however, insisted on watching the act, convinced that one should enjoy to the full every fleeting moment.

He graduated from the Teachers' College, where he majored in maths. He was employed as a maths teacher in Cairo, then worked in Libya for four years. During this period he worked as editor of a newspaper called *Qusasat Waraq* ("Slips of Paper"). There, he coined an axiom which, he says, he will remember till the day he dies: "Do not love a friend to excess, because he may be an enemy one day; do not hate an enemy, for he may someday be a friend." This reserve is uncharacteristic of a man who believes passionately that there is no good in someone who gives nothing to others.

In the '60s, he entered a radio competition for announcers on educational programmes. At the time, dramatised novels and poems were read on the radio for students. He suggested to the judges that he would be best suited to announcing maths programmes. This suggestion surprised radio staff, who refused the idea at first before eventually agreeing to a compromise. They suggested that he give four lessons on a trial basis. These were extended over two weeks when letters from grateful listeners flooded the station, requesting that the lessons continue. They proved so successful that they were broadcast again on *Min Iza'at El-Yom* ("Pick of the Day"), a programme that selected all-time favourites for repeat performances. Maths lessons? demands the sceptical reader. But El-Qamhawi's love for mathematics knows no bounds. Even those who found the times tables beyond them find his enthusiasm infectious. Another factor drawing in listeners was his amiable approach to the subject. Very much the avuncular educator, he approached the radio as a classroom, quizzing the students who had tuned in and requesting their replies — no cheating, please. He received scores of letters from eager students.

El-Qamhawi outdid himself before the microphone in more than one way. Making good use of an unlikely talent — his ability to pick up on different accents and reproduce them, confounding native speakers — he learned the Libyan accent, going so far as to play a totally credible Libyan hero in a radio play about the union between Syria, Libya and Egypt.

He submitted a project to Taher Abu Zeid, chairman of the Egyptian Broadcasting Corporation, and Aida Shukri, who was responsible for educational programmes, for a literacy training programme. He suggested that the alphabet be printed in small pamphlets and distributed to the listeners, but this idea was rejected. Abu Zeid said: "I have nothing for you but air; if you can use it to broadcast your lessons, then do so, and don't ask for anything else." Believing that efficiency required one to make use of whatever was available, El-Qamhawi agreed, and launched *Ya Ahl Baladi* ("My Compatriots"). It was the beginning of the summer holidays, and he came up with a way of putting pupils' spare time to good use, no doubt saving the sanity of parents across the country. His assistants in homes across the country were students. He asked them to help parents and relatives, armed with pencils, notebooks and a mirror — so that they could see their lips move as they formed each letter — with the lessons. The mass appeal of literacy courses, combined with the accessibility of the radio, made him famous at home and abroad; most infamously, perhaps, an Israeli actor imitated him giving the lessons that taught so many to read and write.

This programme received three UNESCO awards, as well as an award from Japan. The affection he provoked was so great that one of his students wrote to him to say that his newborn brother had been named Badie — after Abdel-Badie El-Qamhawi, of course. But his appeal depended heavily on the means by which his lessons were broadcast. He won a competition to present illiteracy eradication programmes on television, but this foray into a new medium was short-lived: "Television's main aim was entertainment, and it depended on famous people. I was neither famous nor entertaining, and my programme was cancelled," he remembers.

In *El-Tali'a Fil-Riyadiyat* ("The Mathematics Vanguard"), the first mathematics book he wrote, he used drawings to simplify theory and render it more accessible. In maths, as in reading and writing, he uses the easiest possible approach. There is no mystification, and this dispels fears that the subject will be too difficult. His books are simple and small. *Crossing to Sinai*, about the 1973 War, includes his version of Snakes and Ladders, which consists of soldiers, dice, and cartoons of the desert route to Sinai, complete with missiles and airplanes. The winner is the one who reaches Sinai first. El-Qamhawi, clearly, is the kind of teacher capable of imparting not only knowledge but a love of learning. Pictures, here as elsewhere, are a crucial component in his pedagogy. He wrote *El-Qamhawi's Tales*, at the end of which children find a two-page explanation of how to draw cartoons. In El-Qamhawi's tales, the picture's role is as important as the word's.

Perhaps his ability to make learning fun is due to his conviction that youth is really the best time of one's life. He rejects the idea that the young are becoming less enterprising and more irresponsible. *Shabab El-Anbiya' wal-Atqiya'* ("The Youth of Prophets and Pious Men") was written to provide young people with role models of devotion and obedience.

This same light-handed approach is evident in *El-Nabi Tabassam* ("The Prophet Smiles"), his most recent book, which relates amusing and cheerful incidents in which the Prophet Mohamed was involved. "This book," he says firmly, "is an answer to the terrorists who say that the Prophet was always serious and refused to be cheerful."

It is easier to understand his sense of creativity and inventiveness in light of his belief that a good teacher is fundamentally a good media personality, and vice versa. This may well be the reason for which he won the title of the ideal teacher (in 1975).

Illiteracy, he strongly believes, affects both the educated and the illiterate because of the profound inequality in communication and development which separates them. Therefore, it must be solved within the framework of a national project: "We will only eradicate illiteracy if people teach each other. We must have a programme of integrated care at all levels. This will not happen unless we fully exploit computers and the facilities they afford."

For the past four years, he has participated in the Cairo International Book Fair, with his books and computer, which he describes as his publishing house. At the fair, he sits with visitors and lets them try out the computer.

Once, he read an interview with comedian Adel Imam, who said that El-Qamhawi was his favourite television announcer. As humble as usual, the illiteracy eradicator thought it was one of the jokes for which the actor is renowned. When the two men met at the theatre, however, Imam told him a story: "I was visiting one of my friends. He told me that his mother was watching television in her room. Then I heard her talking to someone. I asked my friend if there was anything wrong with his mother. He smiled, and said she was talking to El-Qamhawi."

Profile by **Nesmahar Sayed**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♦ *How many weddings could one attend in a week?* My young friend **Rania Abdel-Rahman** broke all records, attending 40 on the same day. A feat to be recorded in the Guinness Book of Records? Well not really, since, you guessed it, the 40 couples tied the knot, two by two of course, in a collective ceremony at the Assiut Mubarak Stadium under the benevolent eye of **Mohamed Raga'i El-Tahlawi**, governor of Assiut. **Rania** tells me that there were 7,000 guests cramming the stands and cheering the mega-*zaffa* on. She was surprised we did not hear the *zagharit* in Cairo! Well, the rumour has it that the couples thoroughly enjoyed the celebrations which featured a band, two famous singers brought all the way from Cairo and jugglers for good luck. It was nicer than a private wedding and they did not have to bankrupt their families, says **Rania**, since most of the costs were borne by the Assiut Governorate. Meanwhile, she is looking forward to the next collective wedding, which will take place in four months time.





(l-r) Collective wedding in Assiut; Minister of Tourism Beltagui and Lord Hesketh

♥ And a good thing Rania attended the weddings, allowing me to keep you informed of what is happening these days, my darlings, because, although I had fully intended to grace the evening with my own rendition of the *zaghruta*, on my way to Assiut I was hijacked, blindfolded and bundled into a plane where a group of Tory-sounding gentlemen offered me a cuppa — this is when I realised I was flying British Airways — to make amends for their ill-bred ways. It was all in honour of a group of VIPs, including the great-grandson of British war hero and the then prime minister, Sir Winston Churchill, who were invited to visit Egypt by British Mediterranean Chairman **Lord Hesketh**. The occasion? The inauguration of the new British Airways direct Alexandria-London flight. I had to play the gracious guide to these important visitors, of course, but I was in such a bad mood dears, because they did not manage to fly my chaise from Cairo in time, and I had to follow the group around Alexandria in one of those limousines I refuse to become accustomed to. It took all of **Lord and Lady Hesketh**'s British humour and considerable charm to give me back my trademark smile. In Cairo, **Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui**'s friendly reception did the rest and I was in such a glorious mood at the farewell dinner offered by the Montazah Sheraton that I broke into one of my much-acclaimed interpretations of the Lambeth Walk. I heard Cairo-born travel writer **Alan Wicker** admit to **Mike North** from **Executive Travel** that he had never seen anything like it in all his travels around the world.

♣ Well, British Airways having landed safely in London, I am back to enhancing my social life with some artistic tidbits although this time I must say I shall be biting into quite a large morsel when I attend the performance of the Nomades-leLoft Vevey troupe at the Gomhouria Theatre tomorrow. The Ministry of Culture, the Cairo Opera House, the Swiss Embassy in Cairo and my friends from the Pro Helvetia Arts Council of Switzerland have joined forces to bring us this treat. The programme, Multiplex, includes three pieces, *D'Eux*; *Bidon Donc*, and *Euskara* and the *Atlanta Journal* has this to say about it: "Six dancers, three stories, one result: A performance with ease and beauty." Oh! I can't wait.

